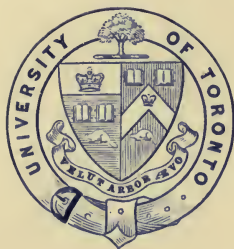




ANEROESTES THE GAUL

EDGAR MAURICE SMITH



Presented to
The Library
of the
University of Toronto
by

Dr. A. H. U. Colquhoun

A. H. H. Colquhoun Esq
with compliments of
Edgar Maurice Smith

Dec 19/98

Montreal

ack. of Dr. Colquhoun



ANEROESTES THE GAUL

ANEROESTES THE GAUL

*A FRAGMENT OF THE SECOND
PUNIC WAR*

BY
EDGAR MAURICE SMITH

MONTREAL
F. E. GRAFTON AND SONS
250, ST. JAMES STREET
MDCCCXCVIII

305088
— 10 — 34
23

[*All rights reserved.*]

Dedication.

TO THAT
DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR AND SCIENTIST,
SIR WILLIAM DAWSON, LL.D., F.R.S., F.G.S., C.M.G.,
WHO DURING A LONG AND LABORIOUS CAREER HAS DONE
MORE THAN ALL OTHERS TO PROMOTE HIGHER
EDUCATION IN THE DOMINION OF CANADA,
AND TO RAISE THE UNIVERSITY OF
MCGILL TO ITS PRESENT
LOFTY PLANE,
IS THIS BOOK DEDICATED
AS A SLIGHT MARK OF THE ESTEEM AND RESPECT
IN WHICH HE IS HELD BY
THE AUTHOR.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

CONTENTS



CHAPTER I.

THE CAMP	PAGE I
--------------------	-----------

CHAPTER II.

HANNIBAL	17
--------------------	----

CHAPTER III.

THE COMBAT	31
----------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

THE ADVANCE ON TAURASIA	63
-----------------------------------	----

CHAPTER V.

THE STRATAGEM	81
-------------------------	----

CHAPTER VI.

WITHIN THE CITY	101
---------------------------	-----

CHAPTER VII.		PAGE
THE ASSAULT		123
CHAPTER VIII.		
AT THE GATE		155
CHAPTER IX.		
THE DOWNFALL OF TAURASIA		175
CHAPTER X.		
THE SUBSTITUTE		189
CHAPTER XI.		
DISCOVERED		211
CHAPTER XII.		
THE ESCAPE		225

ANEROESTES THE GAUL



CHAPTER I

THE CAMP

IT was morning. The thick mist that had held the earth in a clammy embrace during the night reluctantly retreated before the approach of the sun. Like a fleecy mantle it trailed westward over plain, forest, and rivulet until the Alpine barriers were reached, when, soaring up the steep mountain-sides, it mingled with the clouds that the topmost turrets had arrested in their course. A newborn wind came from the east in gentle puffs and dispersed the lagging fragments of crystallised vapour that clung to a clump of bushes. These fringed the northern extremity of

a valley wherein the Carthaginian army lay encamped.

Far-reaching beams radiating from the yellow disc just creeping to a level with the horizon cunningly penetrated the crevices of the tents and awakened the sleepers. The long spell of quietude came to an end. Nodding sentries posted at various points blinked their tired eyes in the increasing light and saluted each other with shouts and gesticulations. They aroused the more hardy warriors who lay about in promiscuous disorder, unprotected save by their wraps, but slumbering none the less soundly.

Thin wreaths of bluish smoke ascended from the smouldering remains of ruddy camp-fires.

A shaggy Ligurian protruded his head from beneath the folds of a coarse blanket and stared about him in sleepy bewilderment. He had fought in foreign lands for many years, and the accidental return to his native country may have aroused some happy memories in a mind warped by hardship. He shivered. Presently the dying embers near at hand engaged his notice, and with an effort he raised himself to a sitting posture. A few others were moving about in search

of fuel, and scrambling to his feet he joined in the work.

Men now began to pour out of the innumerable tents that clustered in this pleasant valley, and the silence was disturbed by the languages of diverse nations—Africans, Iberians and Gauls—blending in loud discordancy.

Amid the confusion the morning meal was soon in course of preparation. The smell of cooking meat perfumed the air and attracted the soldiers to where the food was to be served. They waited in impatience. When their turns came they ate ravenously, for up to the morning previous hunger had not parted company with them during many days, and all were in sore want.

An air of relaxation was conspicuous on every side. The great struggle with Nature was at an end, and men alone now barred the way to victory.

As the warriors reclined near the fires, or squatted in groups demolishing chunks of fresh beef and goats' flesh obtained from the friendly Gauls, they rejoiced in having survived the disasters that had marked the terrible journey from New Carthage. And yet this

joy seemed a mockery. Skin hung loosely on projecting bones, and so stiff had their joints become that sharp pains accompanied the slightest exertions. Emaciated, worn, and weak, afflicted with vile disorders, they resembled gaunt, starved slaves rather than soldiers of the great African Republic.

The majority aggravated their ills by excessive eating and inactivity, overloading their weakened stomachs and refusing to indulge in necessary exercise. But life was still sweet, and they thanked the gods that their corpses did not strew the Alpine passes or rot in the deep ravines. Many comrades had perished on the way from cold and exhaustion as well as from the subtle attacks of the mountaineers.

The site of the camp, though hastily chosen, was well situated. At the rear the Alps rose up tier upon tier in a sublime immensity that seemed to shut out all communication with the world beyond—the balmy plains of Libya, the sun-tinted valleys of the Iberus, the rugged highlands of Lusitania—homes to which so many expected to return victorious and laden with rich trophies of the campaign.

These mountains, lofty and bleak, their bald snow-

crowned heads obscured in impenetrable mist to which the sun's rays gave a fringe of gold, awed the soldiers as their eyes rested furtively upon them.

Strategy and perseverance had overcome the grim terrors that lay entombed in the dark abysses and treacherous paths, but only at a sacrifice well-nigh fatal. The army, energetic and confident, had measured strength with these silent adversaries, and in fifteen days had emerged from the icy gloom lessened one-half in numbers, and the remainder but skeletons of their former selves. The bodies of the fallen served to mark the way for Hasdrubal when some years later he hazarded everything and fell in the attempt to assist his brother.

For the first time in many weeks labour suffered a cessation. Rivers had been crossed, mountains penetrated, opposing tribes conquered, and just previous to the setting of the Pleiads the invaders rested on Italian soil.

Even the descent into the valley had been accomplished with great difficulty. Exhausted, and chilled by the night air, the survivors had not waited to erect tents, but sinking to the earth in whatever covering

was convenient, they had soon become unconscious of their sufferings.

And now the army rested in ease, being relieved of military duty save that of keeping guard. This state of things pleased all mightily, for they possessed less strength than inclination to perform their ordinary work. A rumour spread that they were to recruit for as much as seven days, and added not a little to their delight ; for it was felt that such a recuperation would thoroughly fit them to overcome the forces of Rome.

The early meal was eaten voraciously even by the sick and wounded, who dragged themselves on hands and knees to the tent openings and hungrily seized the bits tossed to them by their more fortunate fellows.

The morning wore on, and each hour increased the number of Insubres who poured into the camp bringing with them abundant provisions, which they lavishly distributed. They seemed unconscious of the admiration they evoked as the Carthaginians sadly compared their own weakened condition with the physical perfection of these Gauls. Their large and powerful bodies, exposed to the waist, seemed extraordinarily white and supple when contrasted with the dark-

coloured breeches of untanned leather. Heavy gold bracelets encircled the arms near the shoulder and below the elbow, while many wore necklaces, baldrics and belts of great value. Their principal weapon was a massive sword made of copper, sharp along the edge but without any point. Some were armed with clubs, and all carried a targe of unusual dimensions, though withal light. The long hair, which these warriors wore piled up on the tops of their heads, added to their height and made their appearance more imposing. It was with the Ligurians and others of Celtic origin that they particularly mixed, owing to the similarity of language. On these new-made friends they bestowed gifts of considerable value, and in but few instances would they accept anything in return.

Dark-complexioned Libyans lounged close to the fires or exposed themselves to the pale sun that poorly stirred their African blood. The majority were clad in tight-fitting leather jackets covered with brass plates, though a number within close range of the crackling logs had discarded this garment in order to rub their aching limbs with the sweet-scented oil brought with so much care from Iberia.

The swords, pikes, and defensive armour used by these troops in battle were piled in irregular heaps near the entrance to the tents, but it seemed impossible to imagine that the shrivelled, languid forms could support the heavy cuirasses and helmets, or with their grisly muscles wield the deadly weapons. The penetrating cold of the mountains had stiffened their joints, and, combined with the other hardships sustained during the terrible journey, had bred serious diseases within them. Beards had become coarse and tangled through neglect. The hair of the head fell over the shoulders in thin, matted wisps and intensified the gauntness of the faces so framed.

A warrior of more than ordinary stature came hurrying towards one of the largest groups with open mouth and eyes rolling in excitement.

"The General has ordered amusement to be provided for us," he explained in answer to the looks of inquiry levelled at him.

"What may it be?" shouted several in chorus.

Nearly every man ceased his occupation while awaiting the reply. Many in the immediate vicinity, attracted by the commotion, joined the gathering and

craned their necks in hope of seeing or hearing something.

"The prisoners are to fight with each other in single combat," announced the informant, with no little show of importance.

"How know you this?" asked one among the listeners whose face betokened middle age and experience. "Has Hannibal thought fit to consult with you?"

A laugh greeted this sally, while he against whom it was directed but ill concealed his anger.

"The General," he retorted, "looks to me to fight and not for advice. But what I tell you is true. I have it from the Iberian who stands guard at the great tent."

But the older man only smiled at this evidence.

"The Iberians are all liars," he said, as he stretched himself full length on the soft sward and blinked his yellow eyes at the sun. Being a man of acknowledged wisdom, his scepticism instantly took hold of the others, and they who had been the most eager to absorb the exhilarating news now scorned it with the greatest vehemence.

The self-constituted herald protested the truth of his story, but meeting with naught but ridicule he brushed past his fellows and angrily stalked away to another quarter.

On the upper bank of a narrow but swift stream that gushed from the mountains and formed the southern boundary of the encampment, small knots of Iberians had assembled to wash their linen tunics and cuirasses, cleanliness being one of their first considerations. For activity and beauty of form these soldiers were the pick of the army, but the hardships attendant on the campaign had reduced them sorely. The well-groomed limbs, once the admiration of all, now seemed hardly capable of supporting the wasted bodies; while the strong, sinuous arms, shorn of all flesh, had become unrecognisable. Their very energy was sapped, and they moved to and fro with great effort, like corpulent men after feasting.

The tents of the Cantabrians occupied a conspicuous space on this side of the camp. The rugged natures of this tribe had best borne the trials that had so thinned the army. But they

were rough and barbaric in their ways, and while despised by the more refined of their associates, quelled all open criticism by the very ferocity they displayed. Unmindful of the wondering glances directed at them, they rinsed their mouths with urine, cooled in their heavy metal helmets — a custom they practised with daily regularity even under the most trying circumstances. Loud lamentations occasionally broke from some of their number, who so evinced the grief felt for fallen comrades. Their strong bonds of friendship caused many of the bravest to prefer the peace of death, even when inflicted by their own hands, to continued existence without a beloved companion.

During the passage of the Alps this devotion had come strongly before the notice of Hannibal, who, to prevent such useless self-extermination, had promised the survivors additional pay and gifts. But some continued to wail and wring their hands, while many inflicted grievous punishment upon their bodies. The more violent of these mourners were now and then seized with spasms, and rolled over and over frothing at the mouth.

Of kindred natures were the Vascones, whose tents lay next in order to the right, and from whose tribes the Carthaginian general had drawn heavily. Possessing the dauntless perseverance of the Cantabrians, without giving way to wild feelings and humours, they were more to be relied upon in a lengthy campaign. They wore little in the form of garments, but rough black blankets of goat's wool enveloped them as completely as cloaks, and served the double purpose of a covering by night.

Fierce Lusitanians, who in the absence of an enemy were wont to create much havoc by fighting among themselves, noisily criticised the actions of their commanders. Many attached to the cavalry had lost their horses in the mountains, and the more ponderous animals supplied by the Insubres called forth murmurs and grumblings.

The rumour spreading that prisoners captured in the Alps were to engage with each other in mortal combat filled these men with joy, for they loved the sight of blood, as did the skin-clothed mountaineers of Asturia, who had been tempted to forsake their highland fastnesses by pleasing promises and the sight of rich gold.

More desperate were the Celtiberians, whose tents were pitched in a semicircle somewhat to the left. Being of that uncertain disposition that is too much elated by success and similarly depressed by failure, the disasters so generally sustained had seemingly deprived them of all spirit, and while some prepared medicines for their ailments, the majority crowded about the fires, sullen and dejected. Without doubt they had suffered much, not alone in numbers but in health. They forebore to maintain their national cleanliness, and lay inert, their tunics soiled with many days' wearing and their very persons smelling unwholesome. Round wicker bucklers and cuirasses, with spears and swords, lay strewn on the ground in neglected confusion, and bespoke the straits to which their owners were reduced. The horsemen alone made a pretence to establish order, and while grooming their steeds chid the foot-soldiers for their lethargy and filth.

A lithe Numidian of the Maurian tribe, who had occupied his leisure time since sunrise wandering about the camp, hearing the rumour that the discredited Libyan had circulated regarding the combats

to be held between the prisoners, hastened back to his comrades with the news. Instantly he was surrounded by an inquisitive group, who gave expression to their satisfaction in shrill cries, while the less weakened indulged in ecstatic capers, strangely out of place amid such surroundings. The lion-skins covering their backs in comfortable amplitude, combined with the bright colours of the cloth tunics visible between the brass clasps in front, gave them a fierce and savage appearance that the dusky aquiline features did not tend to dispel.

Others of this race, more civilised through closer contact with Carthage—such as the Massylians—sat wrapped in white woollen mantles, and the more serious among them frowned on the young men who danced and gesticulated with so much joy. Gloom had not left their own faces since that day near the Rhone when over two hundred brave horsemen had fallen in the skirmish with Scipio's cavalry. They mourned not so much for the dead as for the disgrace of defeat, which bore heavily upon them.

Balearian warriors wandered about in various directions, and were easily distinguishable by their

rush slings, of which each man carried three, wound around his head and body. The more energetic searched along the edge of the stream for smooth, flat pebbles of a size suitable for ammunition. Their broad-bordered tunics of Phœnician manufacture were covered with mud stains. Like the rest they had suffered, but the hope of conquest freshened them and filled them with strength.

Such was the army destined to humble Rome.

CHAPTER II

HANNIBAL

ON this morning Hannibal held lengthy council with his officers. The curious clustered about the tent and vainly attempted to learn the nature of the proceedings from the bronzed warriors who guarded the entrance. The indolence and sloth so apparent in the actions of the soldiers evoked the criticism and sneers of these veterans, whose point of vantage—a slight eminence near the northern extremity of the camp—commanded a full view of the army. Themselves reduced and weak, they attempted to conceal their condition beneath a passive indifference.

“My countrymen fill me with shame,” exclaimed one veteran from Iberia whose wrinkles denoted

hardship rather than age. "To see them reclining in their own filth is enough to discourage the whole army."

"In truth the whole army is already discouraged," rejoined a Libyan in the language of the other, "and the blame rests with all alike. One would think by their lamentations that the journey across the mountains was yet before them."

The raising of the flap of the tent checked further conversation.

Hannibal appeared at the opening with his chief counsellors. At sight of him the idlers slunk away, not wishing to encounter the piercing gaze of their leader. The little knot of sentries assumed a military bearing once natural but now maintained with visible effort.

Hannibal quickly took note of the surroundings, and his bright black eyes swept over the remnants of what had so lately constituted a magnificent army. The misery must have appealed to him, though the stern expression of his dark-skinned face did not alter. He had not spared himself during that long weary march from New Carthage, and while partaking

of exactly the same food as was served to the troops, had given up less time to rest. Those intimately acquainted with his habits marvelled at his endurance, and watched with dread for its sudden termination. It was impossible for them to comprehend the physical as well as the mental resources at his command. Having been schooled from boyhood to bestow such attention on himself as was required by necessity rather than pleasure, his constitution had become so hardened as to be proof against what would have overcome the majority of men. Nevertheless the past five months had wrought changes in the tall, muscular figure. The plain blouse, covering the upper part, hung in loose folds as though made for a man less spare. The leather leggings, too, did not encase the limbs with any degree of compactness, and showed a loss of flesh that could only have been brought about through extraordinary exertions. But his step was firm and his every movement bespoke energy. His face was even a better index to the iron will which knew no master and acknowledged no defeat. The brilliant eyes reflected an omnipresent determination that was powerfully emphasised by the

straight, thin-lipped mouth and the massive chin, whose outline a thick beard failed to hide.

He had given careful attention to the opinion expressed by one of the officers concerning the condition of the army, though he evinced some impatience at the speaker's lengthy explanations.

"It is as you say, Gisco," he remarked somewhat abruptly and before the other had concluded; "the soldiers lack energy and need something to arouse them from their despondency. Methinks they would be entertained by a combat such as Mago spoke of not long since. We have with us the necessary gladiators among the prisoners. Two might be chosen from the number by lot. Yes," he continued meditatively, wrinkling his broad forehead, "it will answer. The plan can be easily arranged without delay, and the men would be amused."

"More than amusement is necessary to fatten their lean forms," retorted Maharbal, whose dark face was wreathed in a frown at the thought of the pitiable condition to which his once superb cavalry was reduced.

"Experience and faithful service entitle you to criticise with severity, but you are more fitted, good

Maharbal, to lead a charge than to revive the fallen spirits of a weakened army," and Hannibal shot a chiding glance at the incomparable cavalry leader.

The others smiled at the gentle reprimand, but Maharbal persisted in his course.

"What you say may be true, but I can see with one eye closed that the bodies of the men are what should be first humoured. Would you have them laugh when the exertion but reminds them of their weakness?"

A hearty laugh followed this sally, in which Maharbal alone did not join, for his mood was all seriousness.

"Trouble not over these things," said Hannibal good-naturedly. "Men and animals shall be properly rested and fed before we leave the confines of this valley."

"Have we, then, so much time at our disposal?" asked Himilco in surprise; "for," he continued, not without trace of a sneer, "it will take some weeks to satisfy the gluttonous cravings of that whining crowd." He indicated the shattered army by a sweep of the hand.

Anger darkened the eye of the young commander at such unjust calumny.

"If," he rejoined with unconcealed displeasure, "my valiant soldiers are gluttonous now it is no discredit to them after what they have undergone, and I would not have had them gratify their appetites at the most trying times in the way you, Himilco, advocated. There are certain things that should not be tolerated by men of civilised ideas, and one of these is the eating of human flesh."

"You did not so express yourself when I made the suggestion," muttered Himilco sulkily.

"I only reprimand when necessary, and then at the proper time."

"Nevertheless had my advice been followed the army would to-day consist of more healthy men. Unusual enterprises cannot be accomplished without making use of similar means."

"My soldiers in their present condition are preferable to me than if fattened on the flesh of their brave comrades."

"Is it more repulsive to sustain life by eating the flesh of those who die by natural causes than to offer

up human sacrifices to appease the wrath of Moloch?"

An uneasy movement ran through those present at the careless mention of the vengeful god, for it was the belief of all that he who spoke in such a way would come to a violent end.

"Why introduce the name of the Awful One?" asked Hannibal sternly. "Though I offer not human sacrifices at his altar, I would not bring down his wrath."

"I fear him not."

"Have a care," whispered Gisco, "or you will regret your worldly boastings."

Himilco was about to reply, but Hannibal silenced him with an angry gesture.

The aggressor gnawed his lip savagely. He was somewhat short, like most of his race, but of that thick, heavy build denoting great strength. His face, while not ill-favoured, was unpleasant to look upon so sinister was the expression about the lips and in the small eyes. Though several years older than Hannibal he looked somewhat of the same age, owing to his having adopted the Greek custom of

shaving. He bestowed particular attention on his person, and in the little group of officers his apparel was in every respect the richest. But he was withal a doughty warrior, and had early distinguished himself under Hasdrubal in Iberia. The soldiers of the heavy infantry under his command entertained a high admiration for the courage and ability displayed by him in battle, but they feared him more than they did Hannibal, for he was both cruel and unforgiving.

It had angered him to be reprimanded in the presence of his fellow-officers, knowing as he did the general dislike they felt for him, and if he had dared he would have retorted. But the dark eyes had flashed on him for a moment, and the unspoken command there expressed would brook no disobedience. He therefore saluted and took his departure, the conference being at an end.

"I like him better on the field of battle than off," remarked Maharbal as his gaze followed the retreating figure.

"He is a brave warrior," said Hannibal quietly. The others present maintained silence.

"And now," continued the General, "see that my plan of amusement is carried out. Have the soldiers assembled before the camp early in the afternoon, for at this season the air is none too warm and our comfort can be greatly regulated by the position of the sun."

Left to himself Hannibal walked to and fro before the standards, unmindful of the reverential glances bestowed on him by the soldiers. Gaunt as his figure was from the severe trials lately undergone, it had lost nothing of its majesty. The contour of the face was somewhat affected by a sinking of the cheeks, but this was not apparent in the profile, which was, indeed, without a fault. The young leader's hair of shining black was uncovered to the breeze, and at times was blown about the lofty forehead in such a way as to hide the creases that thought had carved on the smooth surface.

Some saw in him a likeness to his father—the mighty Hamilcar—but there were those attractions about the son which, combined with the noble qualities bestowed upon him by his illustrious parent, placed him on a higher plane. Though

youthful in years he had, with the calmness and judgment of a greybeard, entered upon a struggle with a power that had forced Carthage to bend the knee and submit to being stripped of her ancient possessions in Sicily and the fair island of Sardinia. He realised the enormity of the task he had undertaken, and in the face of overwhelming catastrophes was not for a moment deterred from his purpose.

By the destruction of Saguntum and the subjugation of all surrounding unfriendly tribes, he had been enabled to depart from Iberia without fear of any serious trouble within these new domains of the republic. Little more than five months had elapsed since leaving New Carthage, when the superb host had marched forth on its memorable campaign, but in that time much of import had transpired. The Pyrenees had hardly been penetrated before the army was weakened by the withdrawal of eight thousand foot-soldiers. Their departure was regretted by Hannibal, though not openly. He even affected indifference in the hope that their action would not unbalance the intentions of the others. In

this he met with success. The remaining soldiers were so well pleased with his behaviour that they taunted their weaker comrades with cowardice and womanly feelings, while some Baleares tossed pebbles into the midst of the retreating mass.

Delay had been caused by skirmishes with the tribes inhabiting the country between the Pyrenees and the Rhone, and these it was necessary to keep in check for fear of their attempting to fall upon the rear of the army. To accomplish this Hanno remained among them with eleven thousand mixed troops.

The crossing of the great river was also a set-back, for the barbarians assembled in great numbers on the opposite side, and though routed with heavy loss succeeded in doing some damage.

And then came the Alps. What terror the sight of these mountains had created in the hearts of the bravest! Looming up against the horizon to heights seemingly insurmountable, they were as very ramparts about Italy that defied the efforts of puny man. A nearer approach to the base revealed shapeless huts clinging to the sides of the bare declivities, like eagles'

nests in the jaws of a precipice. Here and there lean, shivering cattle nibbled at the sparse herbage that forced its way through the frost-bound earth. It was a scene most discouraging to the men, who vowed that such a country was impassable. Their fears were further increased by the uncouth-looking creatures who forsook all occupation and assembled to gaze in awe at the advancing army. Jabbering vehemently and waving their hairy arms, they were representative of more savagery than had yet been encountered. Though approached in a friendly way they fled precipitately to the upper heights, and there occupied the passes.

Hannibal ground his teeth in anger as his thoughts dwelt on the catastrophes which followed through the treachery of the wild mountaineers. The weapons of war would not have been turned against them and they would have profited by the passage of the army had they acted wisely. But without provocation they waylaid the struggling train and ceased not tormenting it until they had been dislodged from their points of vantage. Warriors of these fierce tribes now lay bound in chains subject to the will of the conqueror.

He would make use of them, but he grudged the price of their capture.

He raised his eyes towards the towering mountains in whose shadow he stood, and almost marvelled at what he had himself accomplished. The memory of those three days on the summit, while the road was being cut in the ice and rock, sent a chill through his strong frame. He had suffered at the sight of the shivering warriors, while the silent agony of his beautiful elephants had appealed to him not less strongly. Even now these mammoth creatures were being conducted to the plain, and though some stades distant their trumpeting of joy were distinctly audible.

The entire march had been fraught with dangers and catastrophes. Still, he had overcome all, and even now rested upon the sacred soil of Italy. But was his victory more than an empty one? Could the effects of the struggle be also overcome? Fully a score of thousand brave men had been swallowed up in the rugged paths and rough ravines of the Alps, leaving him twenty thousand foot and six thousand cavalry with which to conquer the erstwhile invincible

legions of Rome. It was a mere handful, and scarce more than a nucleus for so great an undertaking. But bands of Gauls were daily pouring into the camp, and many of the important tribes would treat with him after the first victory. Until then he would have to depend on his own troops, who were as weak as they were lethargic.

The Carthaginian's penetrating glance took in every detail within range—the emaciated forms of the once-robust warriors, the neglect with which they treated their natural wants, and the marked air of slovenliness about the whole encampment. A contemptuous smile for the moment overspread his features.

“Fools!” he muttered. “They know not when they have won a victory—a great victory.”

CHAPTER III

THE COMBAT ¹

AN hour passed, and the rumour originally circulated by the Libyan developed into a certainty. Those who had been inclined to believe it jeered at the sceptical for their egotism and unbelief.

The orders were issued that the soldiers should assemble about midday in the front of the camp, on a good-sized plain, where amusement would be provided for them in the form of a combat between the prisoners. All were commanded to be present.

¹ Such a combat as is described in this chapter actually took place, and is particularly mentioned by both Polybius (iii. 62, 63) and Livy (xxi. 42), though the latter historian differs somewhat in his version from the more reliable authority. The exact time of the occurrence, however, was just previous to the skirmish with the Romans at the Ticinus, some few days after the Carthaginian army's arrival in Italy.

Instantly there was a change. Those who a short time previous had mourned their unhappy lot now became cheerful in expectancy, and forgot to talk of themselves. Mingling with the others, they hastened in the direction of the place specified, exhibiting unlooked-for energy in the struggle to reach the front. Strong and weak tumbled over each other in the race. The speedy made use of the advantage they possessed, and were envied. The muscular afterwards elbowed past these first-comers and installed themselves in the van.

A mixed body of horsemen, composed chiefly of Libyphenicians and Iberians, had been sent on in advance to keep intact the centre space for the combatants. Hannibal and his staff were also reserved a sufficient area.

The crowd attempted to force a way into these guarded preserves, but were driven back. Then those behind pushed forward and caused the front lines to become entangled with the horsemen, who belaboured them with their swords. Yells of anger and pain answered each blow like an echo. The men on the outskirts continued to push, being indifferent to the

treatment such behaviour incurred upon their fellows. In secret some were pleased.

At last they began to comprehend that a ring was to be formed, and that by moving to the right or left they too might be in front. As the majority had stubbornly held their places before, so did they now change. A general upheaval resulted. Some rushed one way and some another. The main body ebbed. For a while the confusion seemed intensified, but gradually an irregular square was formed not free from order.

The unfortunates who had suffered for the stupidity of their fellows cursed the guards and swore revenge. They exaggerated their injuries and craved the sympathy of those who stood near by. Some laughed, while others expressed a sorrow they did not feel. Numbers seated themselves on the ground and congratulated each other on being able to do so without foregoing a view of the arena. All waited with commendable patience. Congregated in motley groups they excitedly discussed the reasons for the impending exhibition. As yet they did not know to what extent it would be carried.

The Lusitanians hoped that all the captives were to fight one against the other. This would occasion the spilling of much blood—a sight their wild natures craved for. The Libyans, on the other hand, while not averse to so pleasing a spectacle, gave it as their opinion that Hannibal would not wantonly sacrifice so many lives, particularly as the captives could be utilised as carriers, and placed in other offices fitted for men who had lost their freedom. This argument was combated by an Iberian, who pointed out how expensive and troublesome it was to maintain slaves in the present condition of the army.

“As it is,” said he, “we have had but little food, and why should any be wasted upon prisoners?”

One of the guards, who overheard the remark, laughed outright.

“No food has been wasted,” he said reassuringly.

“It is a waste to feed prisoners,” persisted the first speaker, “when we may not have enough for our own wants.”

Again the guard laughed.

“You have lost no food by the prisoners,” he explained. “What they have eaten since their capture

would not have been looked at by any of you. It was not fattening."

Pressed for a further explanation, he only answered that the sight of the men would satisfy their curiosity.

It was near the time of the setting of the Pleiads, and there was a warmth in the air that was somewhat unusual, though none the less welcome to the soldiers. The struggle with the Alps was still foremost in their minds, and they dreaded again encountering such an enemy as cold. The noon sun burnt satisfaction on their swarthy faces.

Meanwhile the prisoners were being prepared for the part they were to play in the proceedings. Food in abundance was furnished them. Having been partially starved since their capture, and at times fed on rotting refuse, they lost all control of themselves at the sight of such a plenty, and devoured it with the ravenousness of wild beasts. Still, there were those of the number who, surmising that violent exercise was about to be put upon them, refrained from humouring their appetites to too great an extent. They found sufficient sustenance in gnawing bones and chewing finely the meat that covered them.

But in order to fight against following the example of their companions, they were compelled to move away from the sight of food and the sound of eating.

Shortly after noon they were driven into the open space about which the soldiers were assembled. Their appearance gave rise to loud comments, for truly such misery was pitiable to look upon. Every form of suffering was visible on their almost naked bodies, so that it was hard to believe them to be the same men who, but a few short weeks before, had so harassed the Carthaginian army. Their punishment had indeed been great, and many of the spectators wondered at Hannibal's extreme severity towards these men who had fought in all patriotic sincerity.

"See their limbs," said one. "Such fleshless legs cannot long support the bodies."

"But the bodies are likewise thin," explained a companion. "One can count their very ribs as though they were skeletons. Beside them the poorest of us would seem fat."

"And their arms," continued another. "Surely swords would be helpless in their hands."

These expressions of sympathy and surprise but feebly described the condition of the sufferers. The once sturdy forms were bent and gnarled with weakness, for, besides being improperly fed, they had been made to perform trying labours that really required the strength of men in health. Each rivalled the other in misery. They were a conglomeration of sunken faces, wretchedly lean bodies, and limbs that shook like those of paralytics. It seemed as though they were unable to bear the heavy manacles that rattled significantly as they walked. Indeed, some had sunk to the ground to lessen the deadening weight. But even this gave little relief, for the keepers had fastened them together in pairs, so that the movement of one inflicted pain upon both. The slightest strain bruised the emaciated limbs, while the contact of the cold iron with the protruding bones caused injuries of a more lasting character.

But there was more than this to shock the eye and arouse pity. It required no very close inspection to see that every captive's body was mutilated with cuts and sores inflicted by the scourge. Some were worse than others, but all were bad. The more humane of

the soldiers shuddered at the sight, for while it is possible to look without disgust upon wretchedness brought on by natural causes, the same does not apply to cruelties inflicted by man. The stripes, the congealed blood, and the scab-torn wounds which speak so plainly of the lash, awaken a horror and sympathy that is not easily overcome.

"It is not to my liking," muttered a Celtiberian, whose simple and temperate life had not become hardened to such sights.

"I can now account for the yells that so often reached my hearing in the evenings," said another who sat near by.

"It is strange training to impose upon gladiators," put in a Libyan, at which remark those who understood him laughed.

Unconscious of the effect produced by their appearance, the prisoners congregated together and speculated as to the cause of the plentiful feast and their present situation.

All doubts were soon set at rest by the approach of Hannibal in company with his officers. The soldiers made way for the distinguished cavalcade,

resuming their places with tolerable order as soon as it had passed through.

The young commander bowed graciously in acknowledgment of the cheering that greeted his coming. He never forgot how much he owed to the bravery of those under him, and the meanest among them was always sure of recognition. Hence his ability to keep together an army composed of so many diverse elements.

The applause ceased for the nonce, only to be more vociferously renewed as Hannibal and Maharbal parted from the others and approached the centre of the arena, where the prisoners lay huddled together. The shouts, hoarse and jumbled though they were as a result of the varied peoples that gave them utterance, were unified in sentiment, and the son of Hamilcar was moved. He reined in his horse and mutely surveyed the ragged band of Libyans, Numidians, and warriors of Iberia who had followed him faithfully from New Carthage. It was the remnant of a grand host, but it was the core, and the General smiled with pleasure and confidence.

Seated on his powerful horse, he looked everything

that he was—a wonderful leader of men. His attire was not rich, but its very plainness was becoming to his stalwart figure. He wore a tunic of fine white linen trimmed with purple, similar to the favourite garment of the more civilised Iberians. This was partially visible beneath a leather jacket, studded with small plates of silver, that reached a little below the waist. A light helmet of bronze fitted closely to his head, and seemed to add sternness to the clear-cut features. The superstitious credited him with supernatural powers, and associated him with the deities.

Presently he raised his arm to command silence. When this was obtained he addressed the prisoners in the Gallic tongue, which he had lately mastered with tolerable correctness.

“Would you be willing to fight unto the death for your liberty?” he asked.

Those who heard him quickly shouted their acquiescence, while the others, learning from their fellows the nature of the question, echoed the cry enthusiastically.

Hannibal smiled, for the eagerness evinced by

these weakened creatures to grasp the sword and engage in deadly struggle pleased him.

"They are not cowards," he said, turning slightly in his saddle and addressing Maharbal.

"They have little to dread," was the grim rejoinder.

"Is the loss of life so little to dread?"

"To men in their state—starved and maimed—the prospect of death can be naught but a pleasure. What is life to them?" and Maharbal looked reproachfully at his leader.

"It is as you say," said Hannibal quietly. "But it has served my purpose to have them reduced to their present misery. I inflict not cruelty without reason." Then turning to the prisoners, "You shall draw lots, and two of your number will, in this manner, be chosen to fight one against the other. The vanquished will gain liberty in death, but the victor shall be allowed to go his way a free man, and the possessor of the costly prizes you now see before you."

As he spoke a handsomely caparisoned horse was led out before the admiring gaze of the spectators. On its back were heaped valuable goods, composed

of several military cloaks and all the equipments for war.

Then the prisoners again shouted their approbation and asked that the lots be immediately drawn, so that the chosen ones might the sooner be freed from their misery.

“And are you all strong enough to fight?” asked Hannibal.

All answered vehemently in the affirmative. Some folded their arms in such a way as to display what little biceps they still retained, though in so doing the manacles wrenched them sorely. Others laughed loudly, and in various ways affected a strength they did not possess.

To further encourage them Hannibal commanded that all should be freed pending the drawing of the lots and the combat. This temporary liberty was seized upon with avidity. Voiceless men attempted to sing, but only expressed their joy in unmusical grunts; the lame hobbled about with feigned elasticity, while those too weak to do aught else lay on the ground and stretched their gnarled limbs.

When the drawing was completed, and the many

found that they were to be as they were before, they grieved greatly. Some sobbed like children, and implored their captors to grant them death. Little heed was given to them, save by the soldiers, who wondered at such a strange request.

A scarred warrior, who had listened attentively to some of the remarks passed by his companions, lifted his head and gazed at them in surprise.

"You marvel at the prisoners asking for death," he said; "but why should they not welcome such a release from misery? Who would not cry out for death if his flesh was shredded by the scourge, and his bones creaked from the pressure of the manacles? You will find my words come true if ever you fall into the hands of the Romans," and the old man chuckled at the thought.

Meanwhile the two fortunate prisoners were preparing for the combat, it being the General's orders that they should be encased in Gallic armour such as the kings of those tribes wore. When they entered the arena it was seen that one had the advantage over the other in size and bearing. He was a giant of the Allobroges nation, who had been captured with

difficulty by the Carthaginians. By nature possessed of unusual strength, and hardened by years of exposure and fighting, the extreme chastisement imposed upon him during his captivity had not weakened him to the extent that it had the majority. True, his frame was thin to a pitiable degree, and his back was not free from cruel stripes, but his power of vitality was so great that he bore the weight of his armour with apparent ease, and swung his heavy weapon about as though it was a light dart. He was greeted with a buzz of applause. He danced to the tune of a wild war-song that he chanted while awaiting the signal to begin. He had undone his coil of thick red hair, and it floated about his neck and shoulders like a mantle in the wind.

The other Allobrogian prisoners called out messages to him to deliver to their families and friends, feeling confident that he would be an easy victor.

Some felt inclined to laugh when they saw his opponent, though most expressed sympathy for him. Aside from his inferiority in size, he seemed ill-fitted to engage in sanguinary combat. Shorter by half a head and proportionately smaller than his antagonist,

his figure was withal well knit, and in health would doubtless have been proof against the most violent attacks. Being of the fierce tribes that inhabit the wild fastnesses of the ice-bound Alps, the drudgery and menial work attached to captivity had borne upon him with no light hand. From the first he had offered a stern resistance to the treatment accorded him, and had been dealt with the more harshly. Every part of his body was disfigured with cuts and bruises, and in places the blood was hardly dry.

Even this inhumanity did not entirely sap his strength or dwarf his spirit. No supplication or cry of pain ever escaped his lips, though he often tugged at his chains like a wild animal. Several times he had essayed to escape, in each instance displaying an unlooked-for sagacity in overcoming apparent impossibilities. Once, during the descent of the mountains, he had hurled himself, with his companion, down an icy glacier, but was discovered a few hours later by the soldiers with his left arm strained and unable to disengage himself from what proved to be a corpse. For this he had been severely beaten. He was now greatly reduced, but gladly welcomed action,

and with wonderful avidity donned the armour. Physically he was unfit to engage, but mentally he was a giant. He did not expect to win against such an adversary, but the prospect of death was not unpleasant to him.

"It will be but a poor fight," said one. "To kill a cripple is no great deed."

This remark expressed the feelings of the multitude.

The audience strained forward and eagerly waited.

The smaller of the combatants had, since his entrance to the arena, made no demonstration whatever. While his opponent chanted and danced he stared abstractedly towards the mountains that towered above him. His face, though fierce and threatening, seemed softened for the moment, as though he already saw death.

As the signal was given to begin he turned slowly about and waited the attack that he knew would be forthcoming. The Gallic sword was the only weapon provided for both attack and defence. Having no point it could not be used to thrust with. For this reason it was advantageous to a powerful man, who could wield it with ease.

The tall warrior advanced with a stride denoting confidence, his sword upraised and his whole form overbearing. He expected an easy victory. Measuring the distance carefully between himself and his antagonist, he brought his weapon down with full force, hoping to break the defence raised against him. But in this he was disappointed, for the mountaineer jumped quickly to one side, and so saved his strength. The blade cleft the air with a swishing sound, and the onlookers laughed. Their sympathy for the smaller man began to turn to admiration.

With a crafty expression on his strongly marked face he again stood on the defensive. This time the Allobrogian advanced more warily, though the jibing cries of the soldiers angered him. He burned to end the struggle without delay. His confidence in himself was unshaken. Watching for what he considered a favourable opportunity, he delivered four powerful strokes in quick succession. Three the mountaineer warded off, and the last he evaded. It was cleverly done, but the effort was beginning to tell upon his wasted strength.

As yet he had made no attack, and his breath

was coming hard. He gave ground freely, though the brightness of his eyes was undimmed. His behaviour encouraged the other, who pressed him hard, plying blow after blow with marvellous rapidity. In his eagerness to terminate the contest the Allobrogian did not take his own weakened state into consideration. The resistance irritated him, and he did not cease his violent exertions until his arm pained. He rested upon his sword and surveyed the man before him with unconcealed surprise.

"You defend yourself well," he said, "but I shall kill you."

The other did not answer him, but prepared to act on the offensive.

The Allobrogian guarded himself with difficulty against a well-aimed blow, and retaliated with all his strength. The mountaineer staggered and almost fell to the ground, but he recovered himself, and with wonderful rapidity returned to the attack.

Quite unprepared for this the tall warrior failed to guard properly, and the steel cleft his shoulder. The dark blood spurted out in a jet though the wound was not a serious one.

At this a prolonged shout was raised, for the soldiers loved the sight of blood, and their appetites once sharpened, hungered for satiety. Particularly pleased were such wild races as the Vascones and Cantabrians, some of whom sang for very glee. With difficulty they were quieted by the guards.

Wagers were now freely offered on the mountaineer and taken up without odds by the admirers of the Allobrogian, for though he had sustained a wound his staying powers seemed unimpaired.

A Numidian turned to an Iberian cavalryman and offered to back the wounded man for anything he might name.

"Your first female captive," specified the Iberian.

"Against what?"

"The same; the first Gallic or Roman maiden who falls into your hands."

"Can I trust to your choice?" asked the Numidian.

"I bother with naught but the young and beautiful."

"My taste is not inferior to yours, as you will see before the campaign has ended."

The combat progressed with varying results. Goaded by the wound he had so unexpectedly

received, the Allobrogian pressed his opponent hard. Once his weapon reached the mountaineer's face and left a wide gash on the forehead. It was not deep, but the blood trickled from it into his eyes and almost blinded him. Combined with his other disadvantages this rendered his position perilous. Those who had laid wagers on him now regretted their precipitancy.

Suddenly, by a dexterous movement, he forced the sword out of the other's hand, but in doing this he bent his own, and while attempting to straighten it the Allobrogian rushed upon him. Though lacking his antagonist's animal strength, he was an agile man and kept his feet wonderfully.

The struggle was now hand to hand, without weapons of any kind. It was a strange, though imposing sight, and a solemn silence fell over all. The polished armour glistened in the sunlight, and reflected blinding beams into the eyes of the onlookers.

The mountaineer attempted to reach his opponent's throat, and had almost succeeded when he was conscious of a sharp pain in the fingers. They were bleeding from a severe bite.

The two men swayed backward and forward like a tree bending in a storm, but they did not fall. The strength of the one seemed unable to overcome the skill of the other. By mutual agreement they might have broken away and seized their swords, but the animal was too much roused within them, and they clung the closer together. With eyeballs strained and protruding both sought to gain an advantage.

The mountaineer cleared his eyes of blood by rubbing them against the breastplate opposite. The red fluid mingled with that which spurted from the other's wounded shoulder, and flowed down the shining armour.

A gradual weakness came over them, and they rested without releasing their grasp.

Men marvelled within themselves at such persistence, but said nothing.

The stillness was almost appalling.

Excitement was restrained by its very tension and volume.

The audience leaned forward with quivering nostrils and flaming eyes that radiated towards the one spot.

Presently the fight re-commenced. Unable to shake off his adversary as he would have wished, the Allobrogian dealt him several powerful blows on the head. They resounded with a thud, but the mountaineer pressed closer, and the two staggered. The larger man tried to right himself but failed to do so, and still clinging to each other both fell heavily to the ground.

Over and over they rolled, bleeding from their wounds, and foaming at the mouth.

They bore no resemblance to men. The shining scales of their armour likened them to monsters of the deep.

The Allobrogian fought with body, hands, and teeth. Once, when striving for the ascendancy, he seized the mountaineer's ear between his powerful jaws, and held it so until the other wrenched it away, disfigured and mutilated.

He, too, snapped back like a dog, attempting to reach with his sharp white teeth the thick neck so near to him.

Even feet were used in this strange contest, each trying to kick the other in the extremities.

So intertwined were they that it was difficult to distinguish the proper limbs for the bodies.

Both panted with red tongues hanging limp over lower lips now parched and black. Neither could continue much longer. The movements were becoming more convulsive and less violent. The end was near at hand, but no one could foretell the result.

The sandy soil sucked in the blood, and waited thirstily for more.

The silence remained unbroken save by the contestants, who struggled with the desperation of weakness. Grappling with each other in the embrace of death they exhibited a strength and vitality that their impoverished frames belied.

First one would gain the ascendancy, and the on-lookers would think the climax had been reached, when the other would twist himself out of his dangerous position and succeed in obtaining certain advantages.

The swords lay idly by, at times within reach, but neither wished to alter the form the struggle had taken. Their lean, shaking fingers longed to do the work.

Life, which an hour before was a burden to both, had become precious through resistance.

At last, by a clever feint, the mountaineer's hand reached the throat of his opponent. Feeling the fatal grip the Allobrogian writhed like a serpent, and in his contortions succeeded in rolling on top. In this he had the ascendancy, but try though he might he could not free himself. With desperate energy he pulled at the tormenting grasp, and might have disengaged it had not one of his wrists come within range of the other's mouth. Like a flash the sharp teeth became buried in it, while the anxious fingers tightened about the hairy neck.

Foaming at the mouth like a man in a fit, the ominous hue of death stealing over his features, the unfortunate warrior swung his free arm wildly about, beating the air in agony. And still he struggled desperately, his massive body fairly raising itself up, then rolling from side to side like a galley tossed by the waves.

But it was vain. His eyes, protruding as though about to break away from their sockets, were glazed with fear at the near sight of death. Mighty drops

of sweat corroded his face, which was fast becoming discoloured by a purplish pall. A gurgling sound escaped his leathery lips as though he were essaying to speak, but it was only the rattle of departing life.

The fatal fingers contracted, and he sank in a heap on his conqueror.

A small stream of blood escaped from the gaping mouth.

The mountaineer still retained his hold with hand and teeth, tightening both as the resistance ceased. His eyes were blinded and he could not see that all was over, though the air resounded with shouts from the soldiers, whose pent-up feelings celebrated liberation in wild rejoicings that echoed up the mountain sides.

He did not move until one of the guards went forward and told him of his victory. Then with an effort he rose to his knees and gazed about him.

The wound on his forehead was still bleeding, and his whole face was bathed in red. Particles of flesh hung on his teeth, making it appear as though he had feasted animal-wise. His eyes still glittered with excitement and turned suspiciously towards the corpse

as though expecting it to still show signs of animation. The jagged extremity of his disfigured ear shed drops of blood that splashed on the shoulder pieces of his armour. He touched it curiously, but quickly drew back his hand and uttered a sharp cry of pain.

He was very weak, and sat down on the moist, red-stained earth.

A friend who had shared captivity with him and was still a slave went forward and helped him to remove his helmet. The same man unlaced his armour and gradually disencumbered him of its weight.

He felt relieved and lay back in a restful attitude, while many other prisoners crowded about and tendered their congratulations.

There were those, too, who viewed the body of the Allobrogian with envy, feeling that death was preferable to their unhappy lot.

He who had assisted the mountaineer edged close to one of the swords and gazed at it longingly.

Meanwhile Hannibal had advanced, and was haranguing the soldiers.

Strong, impassioned words fell from his lips—words

that stirred the blood of the most sluggish and made them forget their ills. They saw themselves in the past as heroes overcoming the opposition of man and nature, and their hearts throbbed with pride. Praise from him who had led them from Iberia was balm to their wounds, and they listened, open mouthed, to the rewards and happiness he so vividly pictured as theirs in the near future.

Then he drew the object-lesson from the combat they had witnessed, showing how it applied to themselves.

"You have all witnessed a mighty contest," he said, "wherein two brave men struggled for life. One of the two sits here before you a victor—the winner of his liberty as well as the trophies which are his reward. Yonder lies the corpse of him who suffered defeat and death. He, too, fought nobly, and is likewise freed from the slave chains that held him captive and made him as the other poor wretches who are fated to pass their lives in misery. They envy the victor, but one and all envy the vanquished who in death is relieved of suffering. Will you, soldiers of Carthage, be slaves or free men? It rests with you to say. Behind you

tower the Alps, blocking all means of escape to your homes by land. If in strength and freshness you encountered these great ramparts of nature and overcame them only at a loss of half your numbers, how can you hope to now face them in your weakened and diseased condition? The paths are rough, the ravines are deep, and yonder victor of to-day's combat is of the fierce tribes that infest them. What mercy would you receive at their hands since you have destroyed their villages and taken captive many of their young men? To evade them would be impossible, and you could not cope with their subtlety."

There was no applause nor interruption of any kind, and Hannibal continued with greater vehemence.

"The mighty Padus, swifter than the Rhone, cuts off your retreat eastward, and if some of you succeeded in crossing it the unfriendly Gauls would surely annihilate you. The sea lies not many stades away, but we have no galleys. We must remain in Italy, and it is for you to fix your own fate. The refusal to fight means captivity, and you know what measure you may expect from the Romans. You will be their servants—their slaves—fit to row galleys and perform

other menial service. Your backs will bleed with the blows from the scourge, and your limbs be bruised by the manacles. Look at yonder captives and say would you choose to be like them?

“On the other hand, much glory and honour awaits you by pushing forward into Roman territory. In that direction alone is any escape possible, and to successfully pass through the country means victory. Like the winner of the combat you have recently watched your exertions will be rewarded with trophies of great value. Defeat, like the vanquished, is but honourable death. Is not either fate preferable to captivity?”

A murmur of assent ran through the ranks. Liberty was precious.

At that moment one of the prisoners—the same who had assisted the mountaineer to unlace his armour—seized the sword that lay at his feet, and before he could be prevented, gashed his throat with the sharp edge of the blade. It was no craven stroke, and he fell forward a corpse. When the guards raised him it was found that the head was almost severed from the body.

"Let that suicide impress you all," said Hannibal solemnly. "The man refused to be a slave when death came within his grasp. Soldiers of Carthage, you know your duty. Will you follow me as you have done from Iberia?"

Those who understood what he said answered enthusiastically in the affirmative, their example being soon followed by the others, who amid the tumult succeeded in finding some willing to explain the words to them.

Hannibal was happy, for he had carried his point. Turning to the mountaineer who still sat on the ground, he addressed him in the Gallic tongue.

"You fight well," he said.

"It is the only way to fight," was the grim rejoinder. "Had I done otherwise my body would now be rotting in the sunshine."

"Do you mean to depart soon for your home?" asked the General.

"I have no home. It was destroyed by your soldiers."

"I would welcome you in the army and make you the equal of the other cavalrymen. It might profit you to remain."

The man looked up in surprise.

"My condition is poor," he muttered. "It would take me some days to gain flesh and strength."

"You will not be hurried. The army rests before any advance is made."

"Then shall I remain with you."

While speaking he rose to his feet and seized the bridle of the horse that was now his.

Hannibal was satisfied at having gained so stalwart a recruit.

"Go dress your wounds," he said. "They should have been attended to long since."

The blood-spattered warrior grinned and exhibited his sharp teeth.

"My wounds have had time to dry," said he, "and will the less require attention."

"I shall not lose sight of you," remarked Hannibal, as he turned his horse's head towards the small group awaiting him. Then halting for a moment he added: "What is your name?"

"Aneroestes. I am of the Centrones."

CHAPTER IV

THE ADVANCE ON TAURASIA

THE liberated mountaineer was joined to the mixed cavalry which was originally composed of Celtiberians and hardy riders from Lusitania. These, however, seemed likely to be outnumbered by the Gauls who daily swelled the ranks. Nevertheless the recruits were eagerly welcomed, for they brought with them much needed horses and cattle, which Hannibal purchased at high figures.

Aneroestes was received with favour by the soldiers. His gallant struggle with the giant Allobrogian had not only made him famous throughout the army, but it commanded a respect for him somewhat akin to fear. Scarce any, even of the most celebrated, would have cared to encounter the animal wrath of so

tenacious a champion. The timid sought to be friendly with him, but he received their advances unmoved. His very silence aroused a nameless terror within them which they but poorly concealed.

Soon he was left to himself.

He took his liberty as a rightful possession and made no display of the joy he felt at its recovery. Some thought him indifferent, and marvelled. The more discerning saw in him a man whose bearing but rarely reveals the state of the mind.

He shared a tent with three Gauls who had accompanied the army from the banks of the Rhone, and two veteran Celtiberians whose language he did not understand. Usually he passed the night near one of the camp-fires, protected from the elements by a heavy cloak. He liked the feeling of the cloth about his face, which was roughened from exposure. During the day he devoted much time to the care of his horse, grooming it with all the pride of a true cavalrman. As to his wounds, he seemed to pay them little attention, save for a large bandage across his forehead. His left ear, jagged and mutilated from

the savage bite of the Allobrogian, was encrusted in its own blood.

Reared amid the cold of the mountains—above the valley of the Isara, near to the sources of dashing torrents—his disposition lacked the geniality that characterised the Celts whose villages nestled in the lower slopes. Strength can alone survive the hardships of the Alpine climate, and among the inhabitants of the heights there were no weaklings. The few that were born always died.

The many ills inflicted upon Aneroestes during his captivity quickly disappeared in the atmosphere of freedom. He still limped slightly, but he nursed this by walking little. When not occupied with his horse, he lay about gazing abstractedly towards the mountains. He did not return thither because his section of the Centrones had been annihilated through the fruitless opposition offered the Carthaginian host. Besides, he was flattered by Hannibal's invitation to remain, and the prospects of rich plunder appealed strongly to him. Furthermore, he had in his intercourse with other tribes heard of the autocracy of the Italian Republic and her oppression of the Gauls.

This aroused anger in his independent nature. Like his newly formed companions he was a mercenary soldier, but under the sway of Hannibal's generalship a contagious enthusiasm pervaded all to such a degree as to rival the patriotism of the Romans.

Nine days the army rested in the shadow of the mountains, and at the end of that time the troops had regained the elasticity of step that bounds to victory. The intersecting lines on weather-beaten visages became softened, and projecting bones disappeared beneath the surface of new-made flesh. Unrestrained glee was manifest throughout the camp at the rapid metamorphosis. Wounds healed with renewed spirits, and those who in the beginning had lamented the loudest now made light of their ills. The balm of hope soothed the most intense pain. Fingers lost their semblance to claws; the glassy look of despair faded from eyes whose depths once again became illumined with the glow of ambition. Disease vanished in the wake of filth, and a healthful bloom gradually overspread all. Men no longer avoided contact with water, and rank distempers floated away on the bosom of the stream.

Then came the order to prepare for war, which all obeyed with alacrity.

On his arrival in Italy Hannibal had been warmly greeted by the Insubres, who gave up their lands to his convenience and further supplied him with horses for the cavalry as well as an abundance of food—corn, barley, beeves, and young sheep sufficient to supply the wants of the whole army. His ranks were also recruited by large numbers from this tribe, whose hatred for Rome, combined with their love for plunder, prompted them to such action. And they were warriors of no mean order.

In all this Hannibal was well pleased, but there was war between the Insubres and the Taurini, who dwelt south-west of them as far as the banks of the Padus. This powerful people, after entering into negotiations with the Carthaginian, suddenly refused to treat further and massed their forces in Taurasia. This was their capital city, and being but poorly fortified Hannibal decided to attack it immediately. His army was hardly great enough for such a purpose, but the Insubrian chieftains were only too ready to

supply one of their own to act in conjunction with him and under his command.

On the morning of the tenth day after the crossing of the Alps the soldiers buckled on their armour and fell into line. By noon of the next day the enemy's country was entered. As yet no resistance had been met with, though several too venturesome scouts, falling in with a small detachment of Taurini on the same mission, were dispatched before any aid could reach them. This particularly incensed the newly enlisted Gauls, who loudly clamoured to be allowed to give chase so that they might avenge their slain comrades. But Hannibal, fearing some ambush, refused to grant the request. In petty rage they cursed him among themselves for his caution.

But the land was devastated by the cavalry on all sides, and where the Numidians found it too rough those of the Iberian cavalry, mounted on the sure-footed horses from Asturia, took the work in hand. *vāuts* were destroyed and considerable cattle was *grātured*, but no stragglers were found to gratify the *contāites* of the revengeful.

away (country occupied by the Taurini was, in

richness and fertility, inferior to none in Italy, and possessed all the advantages for agriculture. The inhabitants profited greatly by this, for with little effort they were able to raise abundant crops of corn, barley, and millet. Having more than sufficient for their own wants they sold the balance for gold, wine, and other articles. But at this season, when Hannibal traversed the fruitful plains, the grain had all been gathered and much of it conveyed away at his approach.

The massive oaks dotted the country in clumps, and in some instances so thickly did they grow as to constitute forests of tolerable size. These gave great satisfaction to the Celtiberians, who were permitted to gather the acorns that strewed the ground—a food much favoured by this tribe, whose abstemious living was a source of wonderment to the Gallic soldiers.

Late in the afternoon the army camped within six miles of Taurasia, and much surprise was manifested when it was known that a move would be made in five hours. It was Hannibal's intention to make a night march and storm the city at dawn. In this way he hoped to take the enemy unawares. Though

Taurasia was fortified, the walls were rough, and amid the confusion of a sudden attack could easily be scaled at various points by the Lusitanians and others chosen from the Gallic tribes. One of the gates could then be thrown open and all resistance would soon be at an end.

Meantime he strengthened the number of scouts, and impressed on them the necessity of clearing the intervening territory of the enemy's spies so that the move about to be made would have the effect intended. To more surely foster the deception he arranged that the camp-fires should be kept burning after the army had departed, as the glow from them could be easily seen from the walls of the city.

All preparations were soon completed, and shortly after midnight the order was given to advance. The main body envied the small detachment remaining behind to feed the fires, for with the sinking of the sun the atmosphere had become uncomfortably cold. The darkness, too, was intense, for not only was there no moon, but the thick, threatening clouds shut out all light from the stars.

The way lay over undulating ground that at

times rose to the height of small hills. This alone made the marching more tiresome than on a level stretch, but the chief difficulties were the trees and bushes, for while these would cause little inconvenience during the day, when the paths were easily distinguishable, they now sorely tried the patience of the men. Many tripped on the undergrowth and fell heavily to the ground, sustaining painful bruises and sprains that unfitted some for the duties before them. Curses and groans intermingled with the ordinary noises attendant on an army when marching.

Presently a drizzling rain began to fall and added to the general discomfort.

The soldiers struggled on, stumbling at almost every step, the walking becoming more and more slippery with the increasing wet of the ground. Murmurs of discontent were heard first on one side, then throughout the whole long column. The hardships suffered in the Alps recurred to all, and the present ferocity of the elements combined with the cold were such as to make them fear a repetition. Brave men quailed at the possibility of again measuring strength with frigid nature.

It required the continued assurance of the captains to dispel this dread and maintain the order of the cavalcade, for the rain had by degrees become so violent as to almost blind the soldiers. Fortunately it was not necessary to tax them too much, the greater part of the distance having been covered.

After three hours of hard toil a halt was called at the entrance of a wood. The necessity for quiet was impressed upon all, as Taurasia was now but six stades distant, and if the attack proved a complete surprise victory would not be long withheld. Consequently no fires were lighted. The trees broke the force of the wind, but the air was exceedingly chill, and men huddled together like cattle in the effort to get warm.

The curious sat about in congested groups, discussing the situation, and speculating on the richness of the plunder, Hannibal having promised it all without reserve to the army. Much gold was expected to be found, and while the majority gloried in this prospect the Baleares dreamed more of the fair-haired women who would fall into their hands. Others essayed to sleep. The men from Iberia wrapped themselves in

black blankets of goat's hair; but the Gauls and those of wild habits carried as covering the skin of a sheep or perchance of some wild animal.

The cavalry were more to be envied. Not only had they been spared the difficulties undergone by the foot-soldiers, but they were able during the halt to derive warmth and comfort from their horses by lying close to them.

The night dragged slowly on.

An hour before dawn preparations were made to advance, though not until each man had fortified himself with food and wine. Accompanied by a Gallic guide and several of his staff, Hannibal took the lead. He was followed first by the slingers and light-armed troops, with the Insubres next in order, and the heavy Libyan and Iberian infantry last. The cavalry remained behind, for besides being unnecessary in such an enterprise, the noise made by the horses would certainly have been heard by the besieged. Nevertheless, they were held in readiness, the men either seated in their saddles or standing near by prepared to mount. On them at least would fall the duties of pursuit.

Stealthily following their leaders, the attacking host crept to the far edge of the wood and there waited for the light of day. The city was but three stades distant from this point and was distinguishable by a few torches planted at intervals upon the walls.

By taking a circuitous route the army now occupied a position facing the south wall. Hannibal expected that this ruse would avoid the Taurinian scouts and subject the enemy to an attack from a quarter least anticipated. For the Carthaginians had marched from the west, and the reflection from the deceiving camp-fires could be seen. The plan had been completed by the dispatching of a band of Lusitanian mountaineers and Gauls under Mago to the opposite side, with instructions to there scale the walls in conjunction with the onslaught of the main body.

With such arrangements, and an unsuspecting foe, defeat was not deemed possible.

Anxiously the army gazed towards the east where the broad Padus made its presence known by a gentle purring. Night seemed reluctant to surrender its sway, and as the minutes succeeded each other the

darkness became intensified. Men shivered with excitement no less than with cold. At last the extremity of the black canopy was raised slightly and revealed a grey streak that marked the birth of day. Gradually the pall of night was forced back against the horizon opposite until it faded into nothingness.

Of a sudden there was a commotion among the soldiers. Those in the rear crowded forward to learn its cause, and forced the front ranks out from the shelter of the wood in full view of the enemy. In the open space before them a Taurinian, who had been spying upon the invaders, was rushing towards the city with a swift-footed Balearian close at his heels. While preparing to advance, the Carthaginians watched the runners, whose figures seemed giant-like in the half formed day.

No sign of life was visible in the city. The torches had burnt out and sentries were nowhere to be seen. Old campaigners smiled at the prospect of so easy a conquest. The pursued would give the alarm if he outstripped the pursuer ; but that would be too late, and there were doubts of his even being able to save

himself. He was now within a few yards of safety, and might be able to maintain his lead unto the end ; but more than speed was necessary. As a child the Balearian had only been allowed to eat bread knocked from a post by his skill, and he realised the importance of his present task. He halted and fitted a pebble in his sling. Measuring the distance carefully he advanced a step and discharged the missive. It was well aimed and did its deadly work. Without a sound the hurrying victim fell flat on his face almost at the gate's entrance.

A savage yell from the Carthaginian host greeted this act and disturbed the awful silence.

Intoxicated with what he had done the slinger advanced in the direction of the prostrate body, as though defying the city that continued so quiet. The army, eager for spoil, thundered in his wake.

But a change soon came. As if by magic the walls became alive with warriors, armed and ready to defend themselves against the invaders. Neither wonderment nor fear was expressed on any of the fierce faces, for every man had slept with sword and

shield at his side, prepared to rise at the signal. Spies had kept close watch of Hannibal since his entrance into their territory, and everything was made ready for a stern resistance. The intended surprise was quite expected, as Hannibal at once saw when the organised defence loomed up so threateningly before him. Instantly he commanded a halt, for though he did not fear the result of an attack he grudged the many men he would have to sacrifice before the city would fall.

But the spirit of war was now thoroughly roused within them, and they were with difficulty restrained by the officers. It was like suddenly reining up a horse at full gallop.

Hearing the tramping behind him cease the Balearian looked up and saw the cause. He was too near to danger to escape, and he knew it. Friends' voices calling him to come back reached his ears and seemed as very mockery. He saw a strong armed Taurinian poise a javelin carefully, but he did not move, and the next moment it pierced his chest. Writhing in pain he staggered forward a few steps and then fell. He had waited patiently for the

death stroke, but life was being prolonged in maddening agony. Rolling over on his side he bit at the ground, while the Taurini laughed and threw sharp stones at him. And all the time they shouted to the Carthaginians to come and rescue their comrade.

Enraged at this, many broke from the lines and pressed forward in defiance of the expostulations of those over them. A shower of missiles from the defenders laid twelve low, but the charge was not stopped, and, fired by the example of their fellows, the whole army might have broken loose into wild confusion had not Hannibal spurred his horse forward and in person intercepted the advance. At sight of him, pale with ill-suppressed indignation, his eyes glowing ominously and his thin features contracted, the soldiers halted, then in silence fell back to their places. The command to do so was felt rather than heard.

The Taurini yelled jeeringly and taunted their opponents with cowardice. They hurried the retreat with a second shower that was not altogether wasted, one dart piercing the flank of the General's charger.

The beast reared violently and almost dislodged its rider. Without displaying the annoyance he felt at this incident Hannibal dismounted, and throwing the bridle over his arm, walked slowly back to the lines.

CHAPTER V

THE STRATAGEM

ALL that day there was rejoicing in Taurasia, and the sounds of revelry increased with the approach of night.

No battle had been fought, but the frustrating of the enemy's plan was in many respects equivalent to a victory. Those who had hitherto waited in trepidation for Hannibal's arrival now became hysterical with joy and advocated such bold steps as an immediate sally. They laughed at the precautions taken by the chiefs, and grumbled when called upon to keep watch.

"The walls of the city are high," proclaimed one, "and cannot be scaled by such soldiers as are encamped hereabouts."

"It would be more reasonable if the besiegers guarded themselves against us," added another.

Such remarks were greeted with general approval, and feeling that the danger was removed many relaxed their watch and slept.

But this over confidence was not shared by all. Agates, the chief of the tribe, understood to some extent the nature of the man with whom he had to cope, and he exercised all his vigilance in guarding against any unexpected move. Elated by the trifling advantage obtained over the foolhardy sympathisers of the Balearian, many even among his counsellors advocated taking an aggressive stand. But Agates was wary in the ways of war and determined to do nothing.

The city was well provisioned with cattle that had been driven in from the surrounding country at the first sign of war, while a rich harvest strained the capacity of all the sheds. There was a great abundance, and many months would have to pass before the cry of hunger would arise.

The Carthaginians, on the other hand, were not fitted to undertake any lengthy siege. Winter was

near at hand, and the scant shelter afforded by the tents would be insufficient for the requirements of soldiers accustomed to warm climes. They would be compelled to push forward or return to the territory of the Insubres, and that soon.

So argued Agates with his fellows, when after the repulse Hannibal moved to the front of the city, though full five stades back from the gate (for the wood did not extend in this direction), and there pitched his camp.

Meanwhile the inhabitants feasted and made merry. Beeves and sheep were roasted on large fires, and the warriors sat around tearing at juicy joints of the smoking meat and imbibing large quantities of mead made from barley. Some among the more affluent partook of wine in private.

In their great confidence the boastful laid aside their armour and walked about clothed only in the garb of peace. The air being chill they wore goat or chamois skins across their bare shoulders. One and all sneered at the enemy. The women applauded the valour of the men and encouraged the aggressive spirit so rapidly spreading among them. They

predicted an easy victory should the two armies meet.

To such a pitch did the enthusiasm rise that Agates feared being forced into giving battle.

The difficulty of his position was increased by the behaviour of the enemy as the day advanced. Bands of Numidians rode to within a short distance of the walls and hurled darts into the city. These wild creatures, so dark and savage-looking, clothed in lion-skins and riding their horses without bridles, impressed the besieged with wonderment. But this feeling soon gave place to rage as the effect of the swift attacks was realised. Many Baleares, too, crept up close to the battlements and directed showers of stones at the sentries. They also, with others of various tribes, but especially the Gauls, incensed their opponents with taunts of cowardice. The more licentious made lewd gestures, and demanded the women.

"Give us your wives and daughters," they cried, "and we will spare your lives."

So enraged did the Taurini become that it was with difficulty they were restrained from seizing their weapons and rushing forth upon their tormentors.

"Can you not see," expostulated Agates, "that it is but a ruse of the Carthaginian to draw you into battle? It is his only hope of success. The walls, though rough, are stout enough to resist a long siege, and the city is amply provided with food. Do not then be tempted into reckless action. The enemy cannot long remain in his present position, for aside from the natural inconveniences he will soon be compelled to meet the legions of Rome."

This advice prevailed, though to appease the ardour of the more fiery a small sally was permitted, which resulted in the capture of the more reckless among the assailants. Soon their mutilated bodies decked the wall and froze the impetuosity of the others, who feared this form of death. They retired to their tents sullen and dejected.

Hannibal had hoped by aggravating the Taurini to draw them into an engagement, but finding this impossible he abandoned the attempt and prepared to lay siege to the city.

"The old fox in command will not be deceived," he remarked to the chief members of his staff, "but he

will find it difficult to resist an assault when a breach is made in the walls."

"But that," interposed Gisco, "is no easy matter, and will entail much time. We have neither ram nor vinea."

He was the most cautious of Hannibal's officers, and ever regarded things in the least encouraging light.

"It will, as you say, take up much time," answered Hannibal. "I had expected to be in possession of the city to-day, but now I shall be held here for three days at least, and perhaps four."

"Days!" echoed Gisco in surprise, and those near by smiled at the amazement expressed in his tone as well as in his face.

"Surely, not months! If I am to conquer Rome I must not pass my time before the walls of a Ligurian town. In a few days I shall have other matters of more moment to occupy me. Rome will not long remain inactive, and we must have allies instead of enemies in these northern plains."

"But where shall we find battering-rams and towers?" asked Mago, "for without them we can but poorly assault a walled city."

"Numberless trees surround us, and we have axes," answered Hannibal sharply. "There is not sufficient time to construct towers, but the rams will answer my purpose. Yonder walls, though thick, are poorly built, since the stones are unhewn and without lime in the interstices. A breach can easily be made with little work."

Then Himilco spoke.

"The walls are, as you say, poorly built, and in truth more clumsy than strong. I doubt not that portions would fall before the ram, but even so a storming entails the loss of many men, and we have few to spare."

"What, then, is your suggestion?" asked the General as Himilco paused.

"I would undermine the walls—drive a gallery beneath a corner and so overthrow a whole section."

"I had thought of that, but the labour would be too great and the time is to be considered."

"The Gauls could do the work."

"They might rebel at such injustice."

"Leave them with me and I will vouch for the result," said Himilco, with a venom that intensified the cruel expression of his face.

"Doubtless your measures would be severe, but more than that is necessary in managing new allies. I fear, Himilco, that under your command this expedition would scarcely come in sight of the Roman legions," and Hannibal turned a reproving eye on his subordinate.

"Men differ in the ways of war."

"True, and it is but natural. I follow the ways of my father, and he was a great man."

All present bowed in acquiescence, and for some minutes there was silence.

"Would it not be well," remarked Maharbal, "to build two rams and attack the city front and rear?"

"The idea is commendable, but I fear to divide the army. Still, an entrance at two opposite points would certainly lighten our loss," added Hannibal meditatively, "and I will try to obtain a second by subtlety."

"That is always a chance," muttered Himilco.

"Even so, we can lose little. But for the present we must make ready to build our engines of attack. Noon is near at hand, and I have yet to examine the outskirts of the camp before I return to my tent. Do

you, Mago, have the engineers and sappers there assembled. We can then arrange everything necessary. Meantime I will retain only Maharbal to ride with me on my inspection.

"Tell me, Maharbal," he began when they were out of hearing of the others, "where can I find a man to perform a dangerous service?"

The cavalry leader smiled at the question and gazed meditatively at the different quarters of the camp before replying.

"You have still many soldiers left who have followed you from Iberia. Almost any one of them is to be trusted with the most important undertaking."

"True, true; but for this particular task more than that is required. I want a man to enter Taurasia in the guise of a deserter from our forces. When the proper time comes it will be for him to open one of the city gates."

"An easy matter."

"You doubt the possibility of its accomplishment, but the right man will succeed."

"The right man—yes," muttered Maharbal, almost scoffingly.

"That is the main difficulty—to find a suitable man. It is necessary that he should understand the language of the Taurini and be familiar with their ways. In fact he must be a Gaul."

"A Gaul!"

"You seem surprised. Yes, he must be either a Gaul or a Ligurian. No other would be able to carry out the part."

"No Gaul can be trusted. They are a fickle and treacherous people. Should you prevail upon one to undertake the task he would sell your plans to the enemy."

"And yet," persisted Hannibal, "we have met with nothing but kindness from them. Our army arrived in their country ragged, footsore, and hungry, an easy prey to any people. But they gave us of their best, and made us welcome while we recruited our health. Surely there is some good in them."

"I have no liking for them. They welcome us because they hope by our aid to overthrow the dominion of Rome. It is true they fight with much ferocity and will prove valuable allies, but the duties on the battlefield are very different from those of a

spy. You cannot find the Gaul to carry out your plan."

"He must be found."

Hannibal uttered the words with a determination that could not be gainsaid, and his dark eye swept over the array of tents as though it would espy its object in the midst of all.

"I see you are determined on this course," remarked Maharbal, "but I cannot recommend any man to you. There are doubtless many amongst the Gauls who would feign follow out your orders, but afterwards play you false."

"Such treachery must be guarded against."

"But how?"

"There are many ways. I will decide on a course when the man is found."

"I trust that may be soon."

"It will have to be to-day."

By this time they had reached the western outskirts of the camp, where, from a slight eminence, they commanded a magnificent view of the country. To the left the deep, glacier-fed Duria flowed rapidly towards its junction with the hardly more voluminous

Padus. Near to the fork stood Taurasia. The gray, irregular walls seemed less threatening in the light of the midday sun, but the arms and breastplates of the sentries glistened significantly. Beyond the city, partially concealed by clumps of pine-trees, could be seen the Padus—the glorious stream that finds an icy source in the Alpine heights and wends its way through the fertile plains of Gaul.

“The city is well situated,” said Hannibal, in admiration.

“But it will fall,” remarked his companion.

“Yes, and soon ; it will be of service to us.”

“Without doubt ; and the plunder will satiate the desires of the soldiers.”

“They shall be given everything.”

“Even the women ?”

“It must be so. An example must be made of these troublesome people if the other Ligurians and Gauls are to be kept in check. But let us move on. The elephants are not far distant, and I would see them before returning. The keepers tell me they are progressing well towards recovery.”

“They will have need of all their strength.”

"Yes ; and we cannot replace any we may lose. Indeed, they are of more value to us than men or horses, and should be correspondingly cared for. But what have we here ?"

Maharbal turned in the direction indicated by the General's gaze, and saw a Gaul a little way ahead staring intently in front of him. His back was turned and as yet he had not heard their approach, or if so he paid no heed to it. Presently he turned about, and though evidently recognising the newcomers he made no sign.

Hannibal, too, knew him, and without apparently noticing the absence of the proper salute he called to the man.

"This Gaul," he said, turning to Maharbal, "will do my mission."

"Who is he ?"

"Your memory is short. Do you not recognise the victor of the combat ?"

"A good warrior, but why is he to be trusted ?"

"That you will see. Meantime I shall talk with him."

He signed to the man to draw nearer. Anerostes obeyed the order.

His form was more healthful in appearance than at the time of the terrific contest ten days earlier, and judging from the broad, naked chest and sinuous arms he was thoroughly fitted to endure all the hardships of war. A scar disfigured his forehead, for he had removed the bandage, and his wounded ear still looked jagged and sore. In exchange for one of his military coats he had procured an ample chamois-skin, which was thrown across his back. He wore no head covering, but his hair was arranged in a pyramid.

"You seem to enjoy solitude," remarked the General.

"It is not strange," was the quiet rejoinder.

"In that I differ from you. A man who has but recently attained his liberty should be filled with rejoicing. The yoke of captivity is not light, as you know full well."

Maharbal nodded his head, and added: "The difference between this man's lot and that of his former associates should dispel any gloom from his mind. Even from here he can see them. Their quarters adjoin those of the elephants."

The mountaineer's face darkened with anger.

"The misery of my friends is no source of happiness to me," he growled. "It rather fills me with sorrow."

"You would like to see them free?" remarked Hannibal quickly, and his eyes watched the effect of his words.

"Surely so," replied Anerostes. "But it is not possible."

"It is possible!" retorted Hannibal sharply. "Furthermore it rests with you to win their freedom."

For several seconds Anerostes failed to grasp the full extent of the words, but presently his face brightened in a hopeful smile.

"Will you, then, set them free?" he asked. "All of them: my countrymen—those brave warriors who have fought side by side with me against the powerful Salassi and other tribes of the mountains? Will you, O Mighty One, break the shackles that bind their feet, and the cords that cut their wrists?"

His eyes glowed with unrestrained excitement, and he approached nearer to Hannibal. Maharbal made

an attempt to intervene, but the General waved him back.

"Will you," continued the mountaineer, "give my brethren back the freedom they so love? If so, you shall not regret it. They will become your soldiers and fight in your army until Rome is overthrown. This will they do in exchange for liberty. I can promise you, for I have led them and know."

"That may be," said Hannibal, "but their freedom depends altogether upon you."

"Then shall they be free."

"Are you prepared to encounter a great danger?"

"No danger would be too great."

Hannibal turned smilingly towards Maharbal.

"I have found my man," he whispered.

"It would seem so, but he may not succeed."

"There is a risk in everything."

"And he may prove false."

"That is impossible. His friends would pay the forfeit. My security, you see, is good. Aneroestes," he continued, addressing the Gaul, "the task I am about to impose upon you is no light one. To-night you will enter the city as a deserter from the camp.

It is possible the Taurini may mistrust you," and Hannibal looked significant.

"In that case I will not return."

"You see the danger, then?"

"I do."

"You are a brave man."

Aneroestes raised his shoulders while his thoughts reverted to those of his race groaning in captivity.

"When you get to the city," proceeded Hannibal, "you will attempt to become friendly with those in authority. Tell them anything you think they already know. If necessary take them further into your confidence, for as the storming is to be made chiefly with battering-rams there will be little to conceal. We shall attack on this side only, and when a fair-sized breach is made we shall force an entrance. All the Taurini will be there stationed to repel it, and it is at this time you will serve my purpose. There is a small gate at the rear, facing the Padus. In the midst of the fighting you must open this to a body of my soldiers. The enemy attacked both in front and behind will quickly give way."

"I understand," said Aneroestes eagerly; "but

when may I expect the troops? for it is necessary that I should be at the place fully prepared."

Hannibal thought for a while, then answered—

"On the day following to-morrow, about noon, the breach in the front will likely be sufficient. I shall see that it is so. Himilco will be in command of the troop."

"If, then, the gate is not opened at noon on the day named you will know I have been slain."

"Or played us false," added Maharbal.

The mountaineer turned angrily upon the speaker, but Hannibal checked him with a gesture.

"If," said he "you play me false, the greatest tortures will be inflicted upon the men of your tribe. They will also be told the cause of their punishment before death overtakes them, and their curses shall rest upon your head. You see, I have you well bound. Furthermore, you shall not escape your treachery, for I will make sure of your capture, and a cross will be your resting-place."

Aneroestes smiled grimly and showed his sharp, white teeth.

"Threats are not necessary," he replied. "My

countrymen are dear to me, and they shall be freed. But if my life is lost in the attempt to do your mission, say that mercy will be shown them."

"I swear that they shall be freed if you are faithful. I swear it by Melcarth, Tanith, and all the gods of my country ; even by Moloch, the avenger."

"And I swear by my gods that I shall be faithful to your service," answered Aneroestes solemnly.

CHAPTER VI

WITHIN THE CITY

TOWARDS evening of the same day the people of Taurasia were thrown into great commotion. A deserter from Hannibal's camp had succeeded in making his way past the Carthaginian sentries, though they had almost immediately suspected him and given chase. To those watching from the walls he appeared to elude his pursuers with great difficulty. Once inside the city he was surrounded by a group of soldiers. They conducted him through the lines of excited people to Agates, who was examining the fortifications.

The escort described the circumstances of the man's escape from the Carthaginians, and the opening of one of the smaller gates to admit him in his flight.

All the while Ágates gazed suspiciously at the newcomer.

"Who are you?" he asked suddenly. "You are a Gaul, but resemble not our enemies the Insubres."

"My name is Aneroestes," was the ready reply. "I am, as you say, not an Insubrian, but of the Centrones who inhabit the mountains. You know us well, for we have traded much with the Taurini and the other Ligurians dwelling beyond the Padus. Many of my kinsmen have come to your city bringing with them excellent pinewood for torches, and strong elm for your javelins. I myself have seen the arms and fine cloaks they have carried back in exchange. But I come not to trade now—I am here to fight against the foreigner who invades your territory. The Taurini and Centrones have ever been allies against a common enemy.

He looked to the multitude for encouragement. Some nodded in assent, while the more enthusiastic even acclaimed their approval in words.

Agates checked these latter with a sign.

"The man may be a spy for all this," he said.

"I am no spy," retorted Aneroestes.

"It is strange," said Agates. "First you enter the service of the Carthaginian, and later seek the protection of a besieged city in order to make war upon him. Truly, the more I think of it the more positive am I of your deceit."

Those who at first had been the most eager to welcome the mountaineer now began to share the suspicion of their chief and slunk away.

"I am no spy," repeated Aneroestes doggedly. "I hate the Carthaginian and his soldiers. Was it not they who passed through our country by force? They destroyed our villages and drove away the cattle we herded for our sustenance. Men and children fell beneath the sword, while I, with many others of the young men, was led away into captivity. Even now my brothers lie in yonder camp and cry out in their misery, for they are borne down with the weight of the shackles and their bodies are torn from scourging. Is it then strange that I should seek service against one who has so oppressed my kinsmen?"

Aneroestes was by this time uncontrollably excited, and he spoke with a rude eloquence that

carried conviction to his hearers. Furthermore, his general appearance added to the force of his words, for he was a goodly warrior to look upon.

"The man speaks the truth," shouted some one from among the crowd.

"The hope of revenge will make him fight well," cried another.

These and similar remarks assured Aneroestes. He saw that for the time being he had the people with him, though Agates was still doubtful.

"How comes it," the latter asked, "if the young men of your tribe were made prisoners, that you were set free? For, indeed, no shackles bind your feet, and your garments are not such as those worn by slaves. More than this, you carry arms of excellent quality. I warn you to be careful what you answer. Liars share the same fate as spies," and he glanced significantly towards one of the towers where, in the fading light, the forms of several bodies could be seen dangling in the air.

But Aneroestes only laughed at the unspoken threat.

"I have seen death before," he replied, "and in many forms. The men of the Centrones are bred

to regard it without fear. If your over-cautiousness prompts you to treat me as an enemy you will be the greater loser. There are worse things than death, and defeat is one of them. You think it strange that I am not like my brethren—slaves of the conqueror—but I tell you I was one until ten days ago. Cords bound my wrists—see the marks,” and he held out his hands for the chief to inspect. “My back, too, bears many scars from the rods and scourge. If you still doubt me I will prove it to you.”

No one spoke as with a swift movement he tore off his fur covering and stood stripped to the waist before the wondering Taurini, who were unaccustomed to such fiery earnestness.

During the conference torches had been lit and the bearers of these now crowded close to the man, thus revealing him to the others in the flickering lurid light. He had certainly spoken the truth. His back was almost completely disfigured with wounds scarcely healed. Few could refrain from exclaiming at the sight, and even the face of Agates softened, for the scars imbedded so deeply in the white flesh signified tortures of unusual severity.

"You now see that I spoke truly," proceeded Aneroestes. "I was a captive, but I won my liberty by fighting an Allobrogian giant for the amusement of the soldiers. He thought to be victorious, for I was lame and unfitted for such a struggle. I bear the mark of his sword across my forehead, and he bit away part of my ear, but he could not overcome me. Still, he fought well. I wounded him in the side with my sword, but I killed him with my hands. It was a great struggle, and Hannibal gave me my liberty, with costly presents and a horse of good blood."

"We want such warriors as this," remarked Britomar, a man of middle age, aside to Agates.

"He talks well."

"But see the muscles of his arms and body. He could wield a sword with the best of our young men, even with Concolitanus."

"The more reason why we should receive his advances with caution. One man can hardly win a battle, though he may lose one."

"And I would not advise you to hasty action, but this man has given a fair account of himself. His

very presence here will encourage our soldiers, and he may further have much to tell us of the enemy's doings."

"What you say seems wise, good Britomar," said the chief slowly, "but be not over-confident of the man. Watch him closely, and leave him not alone for a moment."

Meanwhile a number of the Taurini had entered into conversation with Aneroestes and welcomed him with friendly protestations. They were impressed with the story of the combat, as they were themselves great warriors, and admired the victor's strongly knit figure. In appearance and habits they resembled the Insubres, though a closer contact with tribes inhabiting the country to the south of the Padus had made their natures less rough.

While many were content with the hide of a sheep or goat as a covering for the upper part of the body, the greater number were attired in tunics of coarse wool, reaching to the loins and gathered in at the waist by a belt. A few of the more savage favoured a peculiar form of cudo in which the face appeared between the upper and lower jaws of the animal

while the rest of the skin fell over the back and shoulders.

Aneroestes received their advances cordially, and when Agates again questioned him they ill-restrained their impatience.

"Tell me," he said, "how you evaded the Carthaginian sentries, for they watch so closely that some of our spies have fallen into their hands?"

"I feigned to be carrying a message to one of the captains. When I came up to where he was I dashed forward towards your gate. Your warriors will tell you that the Numidians almost overtook me. Indeed, they would have done so if the missiles thrown from the walls had not checked them," and the mountaineer looked to those near by to verify his story.

"Yes, yes; we saw that," assented several.

"He ran swiftly, but he had little time to spare," remarked one.

"I would have failed but for the help from the city," continued Aneroestes. "But it is well. I have information that will be of value to you. Some of the plans of the enemy are known to me. To-morrow the city will be attacked with battering-rams."

"We shall be prepared!" shouted the crowd.

With one accord they waved their weapons aloft and redoubled their cries of assurance.

The smoking torches revealed massive clubs studded with nails, short knives, and ponderous swords, grasped by brawny hands that would only loosen in death. Some of the warriors were partially hidden by the far-reaching shadows, while more were altogether invisible in the background of darkness. But their voices were heard, and the wavering light illumined scores of set faces that would not quiver at sight of danger.

Agates seemed pleased at the enthusiasm, but he motioned Aneroestes to step near, and said—

"Keep your secrets for the ears of those in command."

He then dismissed the people in an address, exhorting them to the greatest vigilance. "For," said he, "the enemy is ever watchful to obtain some advantage in ways we may little think of."

When they had dispersed he turned to Aneroestes and commanded him to speak freely.

"There are none here to listen to you," he said,

"save those who should. Due thought will be given to what you say, but we are men of age and discretion who will not be blinded by fair-sounding tales."

And, indeed, it seemed that in the ebbing of the multitude the chosen ones of the tribe had remained like rocks on the shores of the sea. These men formed the council that directed the affairs of the city, both in times of war and peace. Many were as yet young, but they had one and all become distinguished through acts of bravery and wisdom.

"I tell you what is true," said the mountaineer with some show of anger. "Early to-morrow Hannibal will attack the city on this side facing the west. If you do not believe me make no preparations to repel the battering-ram."

"We have been prepared for this from the first, and will not now alter our plans."

Agates spoke more quietly, for he was beginning to be influenced by the apparent honesty of the deserter.

"Do you know how many rams will be used to storm the city?" asked Britomar.

"That I cannot say. I saw one being constructed, but there may be more."

"And will all the attack be made at the one place?"

"I heard it said that two points might be attacked; the main one directly in front of the camp and the other somewhat more to the south."

This gave rise to considerable discussion between Britomar and a younger warrior as to the best mode of repelling the double move, but the issue was trifling and interested the mountaineer little.

During the early part of the evening a number of the women brought food to the warriors sitting in council, for there was much to arrange before the morrow. Aneroestes watched them closely, and there was admiration in his gaze, for these women of the Taurini were very beautiful. It was a novel sight to him to see such smooth skins and figures so perfectly developed. Massive bracelets of gold encircled the white arms, making them seem the more dazzling, while necklaces and belts of the same precious metal were worn in profusion. Garments of coarse wool constituted the ordinary dress, but a few were attired in material of more delicate texture such as the mountaineer had never before seen. These were

obtained from traders of other races who not infrequently visited Taurasia, owing to its important location.

So enraptured was he that he failed to notice the curiosity he had awakened in those at whom he was so steadily staring.

"Our women are beautiful," remarked Agates by way of interruption.

Aneroestes nodded mechanically. His gaze had settled upon a young girl of exceptional grace, who had recently moved into the light. She was talking quietly to several companions, but presently she moved towards the chief, who greeted her fondly.

"She is my daughter," he explained. "It is said she is the most beautiful of our women."

"It is so," murmured several.

Aneroestes answered nothing, but the admiration expressed on his face became intensified. The girl looked conscious. At her father's command she offered food to the stranger. He thanked her, but his voice sounded harsh in his own ears.

Ducaria, the daughter of Agates, was indeed beautiful and much sought after by the young warriors of

the tribe. Her hair was slightly darker than was customary among the women of Liguria, and was tinged with a reddish hue that added to its attractiveness. While marvellously well cut, her features were somewhat large and bespoke a commendable determination. This was made more evident by the great eyes of deep blue for which she was justly celebrated. The years of her life hardly numbered a score, and she was the sole surviving child of the chief.

The rude noises from the Carthaginian camp were at all times audible in the various quarters of the city, but in the quietude of evening they were even more distinct.

Aneroestes seemed suddenly disturbed by the ribald laughter so close at hand, and after staring at the blinking fires for a brief space he turned to Agates.

"Why do you keep your women with you?" he asked.

"Where else should they be? Would you have the wife live apart from her husband, the daughter from her father?"

"I would have them protected," said Aneroestes vehemently. "I would have them out of danger."

"Where would they find protection away from the men of the tribe, and where would be their safety?"

The chief's words were greeted with the approval of all present.

"Would you not have the women share danger with their mates?" asked one matron who sat between husband and son. "Think you that we want life when our dear ones are slaughtered?"

"If death was to be your lot then would I counsel you to remain with your protectors. But defeat means more than death."

"The thought of that will but make us strike the harder," exclaimed Britomar.

"We will annihilate the enemy," shouted a younger man.

"But what if you should meet with defeat? In battle there is no certainty. Even with everything in your favour victory might, through some unseen way, be snatched from you. The Carthaginian is a general of many resources. I would advise you to remove the women to some place of safety."

"Our women are safer in our city than elsewhere.

If we fall in their defence then must they prepare themselves for death."

The speaker was an old warrior who had seen much fighting, and he understood the horrors of defeat.

"And none will be afraid," added Ducaria solemnly.

All looked at her in surprise, as it was not customary for the younger women to participate in a discussion of that nature. But none reprimanded or gainsaid her.

She stood by her father with parted lips and dark, glowing eyes that stirred up the patriotism of the most timid. Anerostes met her look for a moment only. Then his head fell. His task was becoming hard—even painful.

On the one hand the success of his mission would free the two score captives, the scourged and emaciated slaves, once gallant warriors, his kinsmen and brothers. But the downfall of the city would mean the despoiling of all these noble women, and among them Ducaria.

He trembled violently.

"What great danger can there be?" said Agates.

"We know the plan of the enemy and will be pre-

pared for the fiercest attack, and," he added more pointedly to the mountaineer, "you felt assured of our success but a short time since. Surely naught could have happened to alter your opinion. Are our warriors less muscular or valiant than you would wish?"

"Not so. My fears were roused without a proper cause. I have seen your women—more beautiful than any I have ever met—and I trembled for their fate."

Aneroestes paused and looked about him, but he sought not to see Ducaria.

"What would you advise?" asked the chief.

"I would counsel you to be cautious."

"We will not chide you for such anxiety. But here is Concolitanus. What news may he have for us?"

"None of importance," answered the warrior. "All is quiet in the quarter I have been watching."

He surveyed Aneroestes, not having seen him before.

"This is the deserter from the camp of the Carthaginian," explained the chief.

"I heard of his coming."

"He has brought us information of value."

While several told the news, Anerostes secretly admired the newcomer, for he was possessed of much beauty and strength. Though scarcely more than a young man his deeds of prowess were many, while he combined with unusual bravery a skill and discretion rarely found in one of his temperament. He was very tall and strongly made. At a glance it could be seen that he could wield a sword with wonderful power, and he was furthermore dexterous in the use of all weapons. His dress differed little from that of his companions save that the fur he wore as a mantle over his shoulders was exceptionally fine. The ornaments that adorned his person were likewise very valuable, and the sword hanging across his back was well tempered, and of Roman make. The long yellow hair was coiled on the top of his head. He was admired by the women as he was respected by the men, though his fiery counsel was at times apt to try the cautious feelings of the more aged.

"How know you," he asked, after listening to the

story of Aneroestes' entry into the city, "that this man is not sent by the Carthaginian to watch our movements and betray us? He has no interest in joining us, and we do not need his services."

"You may be glad of my services before the siege ends," growled the mountaineer.

"You have no mean opinion of your own prowess," and Concolitanus laughed sneeringly.

"I have proved myself to be the equal of most men."

"And yet you were taken a prisoner."

Some of the men smiled at this cut, while a few of the women laughed outright.

"I lost my liberty," retorted Aneroestes, "but not before I killed three men of the number who fell on me. But what is more, I won back my freedom by slaying a man full as large and strong as you, Concolitanus, though I was weak from wounds inflicted by the scourge. And I killed him with my hands—I choked him."

The speaker had risen to his feet, and with eyes afire approached threateningly towards the Taurinian warrior.

Agates intervened, fearing a more serious dispute.

"It is wise to exercise the greatest caution," he remarked to Concolitanus, "and until we are assured of this stranger, we must not trust him overmuch. But it is unjust to repel his advances and impute treacherous motives to his every action. He offers himself as a friend. If he is such we must not make him our enemy."

"Captive enemies can do little harm," persisted Concolitanus.

"Still a friend can be of more service."

The young warrior made no reply, but turning to Ducaria, muttered—"It would be safer to get rid of the man."

"I would not counsel such action," rejoined the girl, "for he seems brave and good."

"He is but an uncouth mountaineer, unworthy of your consideration."

Concolitanus spoke with some heat, for he desired to make Ducaria his wife. His suit had not proceeded as he would have wished, and he was jealous of any man she might chance to notice.

"Still he is brave; a great warrior; and he has risked much in joining our forces."

She shot a glance at the mountaineer while she spoke, and met his eyes fixed searchingly upon her. There was adoration in the stare. She turned away in confusion, but not before her companion had noted the cause.

"It would seem," said he, "that this spy would cast envious eyes upon our women, even to the chief's daughter."

He addressed himself loudly to the assemblage, and his words were followed by a dead silence. But only for a moment. Aneroestes made a rush at his tormentor, but before he could reach him he was seized by three men, one of whom was Agates.

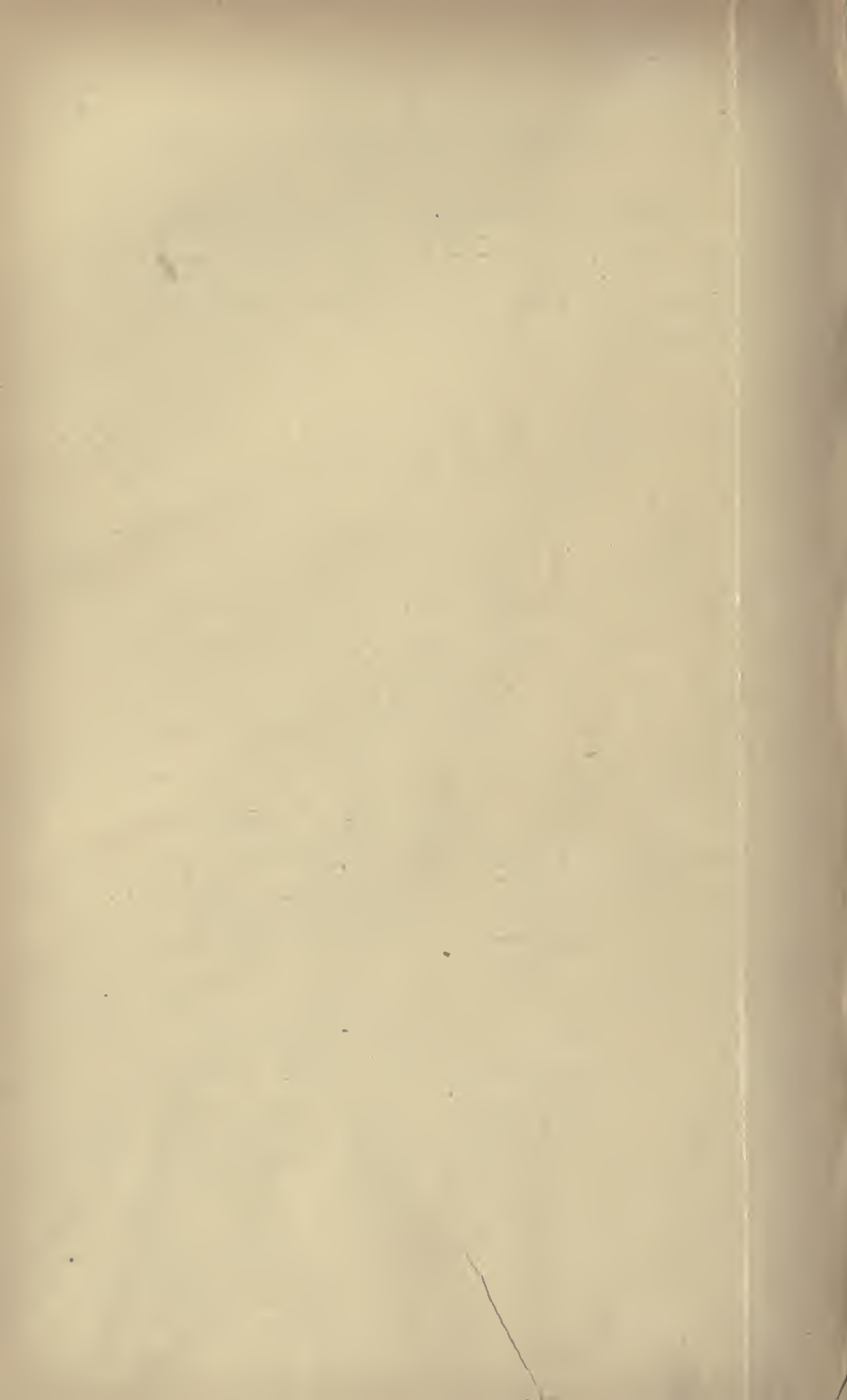
"Desist!" he cried angrily.

The mountaineer ceased struggling at the command of the chief, but he did not remove his eyes from Concolitanus, who, standing with drawn sword, cried out—

"Let him come."

"Your conduct, Concolitanus, is unseemly," said Agates with indignation. "Say nothing further to the stranger, I command you."

Concolitanus again turned to speak to Ducaria, but she moved away from him, and went near to her father. And she did not look unkindly at Aneroestes.



CHAPTER VII

THE ASSAULT

HANNIBAL had carried on his preparations with vigour, and before noon of the second day a monster ram was propelled towards the city, under cover of a testudo. A section of the wall facing the camp, but not too close to the gate, was chosen as the point of attack. Those apportioned to work the engine, though they numbered nearly fivescore, were also protected by the testudo, and were thus enabled to advance without serious danger. In their wake marched a mixed body of slingers and light infantry, who, however, halted just beyond range of the enemy's missiles. They formed a small vanguard to the army proper drawn up in order of battle further back. On either wing was posted the cavalry,

and the foot-soldiers were massed in the centre. All were held in readiness, as the opposing walls were loosely built, if massive, and none could foretell when a breach of sufficient importance might be made to warrant a storming. It was, moreover, expected that so imposing an array would make the enemy afraid to exercise any open manœuvring.

Though late in November, the air was balmy and pleasant. The sun had risen unseen behind a bank of voluminous clouds, but by degrees its gleam penetrated the more filmy portions, and peeped through the rifts, dispelling the early winter gloom and emblazoning the arms of the soldiers.

Every eye was turned on the testudo as it crept slowly forward. It was of necessity large—nearly forty feet deep and little less in width—and while roughly built, was fitted to withstand much. In shape it resembled a hut, but in order to permit the workings within of the ram, it was open at either end, though the front was protected by a short roof that slanted outwards. The frame was of heavy wooden beams. Over the sides and roof were stretched numerous fresh hides stuffed with chaff

and weeds which had been soaked in vinegar. This process rendered the structure well-nigh fireproof. Small, heavy wheels were attached to the base, and enabled a body of men to push it forward without much effort, though the ram, which ran the length of the testudo and extended behind and before, added much to the weight. This instrument of attack, though simple in device, was rapid and effective in its work. A single beam—in this instance the trunk of an ash—some hundred feet in length, was suspended by chains to another beam fixed transversely over it against the roof of the testudo. It could thus be moved to and fro without the weight resting on the soldiers.

Hannibal smiled at the assurance so prevalent on all sides, for he read in it an early victory. He personally directed the placing in position of the testudo, and from near by superintended its operations for some time. He saw that the masonry would not long bear up against the attack, and he exhorted his followers with encouraging words—

“Spare not your strength,” said he. “To-morrow the city will be ours.”

None doubted that his prophecy would come true, and a ferocious enthusiasm pervaded the army.

The workers of the ram were relieved at short intervals, and there was no weakening in the blows. Men of every nationality threw aside their clothes before seizing the beam, and with wild shouts hurled the rudely shaped head against the wall of stone.

Meantime the besieged were inactive. They had watched the approach of the engine in wonderment. Few, save Agates, had ever seen a testudo, and none were afraid, for an unwarranted confidence prevailed in the strength of the defences. Accustomed as the Taurini were to warfare, they had never engaged with aught but Gauls, or tribes of their own race, who assaulted each other's villages without such methods as were put into practice by the rival republics. Consequently the walls had never before been obliged to resist the blows of a ram.

"The army is assembled as though a storming were intended," remarked Britomar, while he surveyed the mass drawn in line of battle.

Agates called attention to the testudo that had halted about sixty feet from where they stood. A

little later the ram was seen to draw back, then shoot forward with a terrific force, propelled by a hundred pairs of arms. The metal head struck the wall with a dull thud that echoed like thunder. Pieces of loose clay and stone became displaced and rattled down the sides with much noise.

At an order from the chief a jagged rock was rolled to the edge of the battlements, and when the ram next advanced this was hurled upon it. But the beam was a heavy one, and nothing was effected except that the force of the blow was slightly weakened.

Soon the engine began to work more rapidly, and the prolonged poundings startled the inhabitants. They assembled in prominent places, followed by their wives, and excitedly discussed the impending danger. The children left alone in the huts crept to the openings and cried piteously. Many among the warriors were thoroughly alarmed, for they disliked this strange mode of warfare.

Some of the women encouraged the violent to organise a sally and destroy the enemy's machine, a plan that appealed to their restiveness. But the wiser knew this would be fatal in the face of the

army, though they experienced difficulty in making their caution prevail.

And yet something had to be done. The besieged could not see their fortifications shattered without retaliation. As they had previously been filled with confidence, so were they now overcome with despondency. On a field of battle they could fight for life and all that was theirs, but here, hemmed in without means of repelling a fatal attack, they seemed almost helpless.

"We might set fire to the covering that protects the workers, and then drive them away with our javelins," suggested Concolitanus.

"If the skins have not been prepared to resist fire," said Agates. "Nevertheless," he added, "it can do no harm to make the attempt, and our people will gain more confidence in activity."

Expert hands immediately set to work to cover javelins and darts with wool soaked in oil. These were then ignited and hurled against the roof of the testudo. The result was not encouraging, but the work was for a while carried on spiritedly.

The ram pounded away without cessation, and

when a breach was at last made terror spread throughout the city. Though the opening was small there were many who imagined it more serious, while others feared, and with reason, that it signified the beginning of the city's downfall. Inner defences were rapidly constructed at the weakening spots, and men were apportioned off to repair the damage as soon as darkness fell.

Ducaria attended her father whenever possible. With the increase of danger she seemed to become filled with an enthusiasm that gradually communicated itself to those with whom she mingled.

"Be patient," she said, "and act according to my father's orders. He is a wise leader, and will advise you to do what is best."

To others who seemed unduly cast down she spoke assuringly.

"Tremble not at the noises made by the enemy's engines, nor let fear possess your hearts, lest your arms grow weak when they should be strong."

Aneroestes had watched the movements of the women for some time, though his eyes rarely moved from Ducaria. Her attractiveness and rare beauty

seemed to exercise a spell over him that he could not rid himself of. Barbarian though he was, his better instincts revolted at the idea of giving up these creatures to the despoiling hand of the conqueror. In the precipitous ravines of the Alps he had once been mighty, a leader and the son of a chieftain, but he had seen the homes of his tribe destroyed, and many of the bravest killed or taken prisoners. He had been willing to inflict similar punishment upon the warriors of another nation to free those of his own, but the thought, the sight of Ducaria, stayed his intention. To war against women was distasteful to him, and he grew troubled when he thought of what the morrow would bring forth.

He gazed abstractedly about him. The day was now on the wane, and the sun poured its rays on the backs of the Carthaginian soldiers, gilding their helmets and throwing long, warlike shadows against the city.

An ease pervaded the army, as an engagement was now impossible. The testudo still retained its original position uninjured, and the ram continued to shoot backward and forward, its metal head bruised

and disfigured from severe contact with the stones. Every stroke was accompanied by a cloud of dust that arose from the dislodged portions.

Though the day was seasoned by the chill of autumn weather steam arose from the bodies of those working the engine, so greatly did they perspire from their efforts.

But Aneroestes did not see these men, owing to the shelter afforded them. His gaze wandered to the mixed Iberian and Gallic cavalry to the left, not many stades from the Padus which flowed majestically along through the rich plains, gathering volume from tributaries almost equal to it in size. He half wished himself back among his new-made companions, for in simple duties his mind would be spared all turmoil. As his gaze again swept the plain the figure of Hannibal, surrounded by several of his staff, loomed up distinctly.

"Yes, it is he," he muttered.

"Who?" asked Agates.

The mountaineer started in surprise, for he had unconsciously spoken what was passing in his mind.

"My sight is good," he replied, "and though the light from the sun is strong I can discern the Carthaginian general."

"Where?"

"Directly in the centre, not far behind the testudo. He is riding a black horse. You can distinguish him by his purple mantle and his size. He is much the largest of the group."

Agates looked as directed, as did many of the others. Ducaria made a shade of her hand and gazed long at the hostile army.

"Is he as noble as some say?" she asked.

"He is noble," answered Aneroestes; "but when balked in a design he is fierce and cruel. We could hope for but little mercy from him."

"It would be well if he were killed," remarked Concolitanus savagely.

"He has captains more ferocious than himself."

"But he is the head."

"True," assented Aneroestes; "but he lives," and his eyes again became fixed on Ducaria.

Concolitanus was not slow to perceive this, but a cry from below prevented him from saying anything.

A large stone had been dislodged and had crushed two men.

The Taurini anxiously waited for nightfall. It came none too soon, for the wall was sorely damaged when the last blow was struck for the day. The breach was not sufficiently large to threaten a further falling away of the stones, but a close inspection showed that it would poorly stand another day's battering. Repairs were instituted without delay, and the light from the pine torches revealed anxious-faced warriors toiling under heavy burdens.

Britomar, who well understood the art of building, superintended the work. The jagged hole was repaired after several hours and an inner wall erected some thirty feet in length. This would practically take the place of the main structure in front when it should tumble.

All now saw that their safety lay not in the walls.

Aneroestes was almost continually with Agates, for the latter, while at first suspicious, had since found confidence in the muscular mountaineer. He had all along secretly admired the fearlessness that had

marked his entrance into the city, as well as the manner in which he had defied Concolitanus. Now he trusted him completely, and he further valued his opinions on the means that should be taken in the defence of the city. Perhaps he was touched at the young man's thought for the women and his wish to place them beyond danger. At midnight he said—

“It is late. Get you to sleep, for I will watch till morning.”

But Aneroestes refused.

“I, too, will remain on guard,” he said, “though there will be no attack before morning.”

They stood together and watched the enemy's camp-fires. The mountaineer was surprised to learn that messengers had been dispatched early in the night to the kindred tribes living about the Padus asking for assistance to repel the invader.

“Our walls may not survive,” explained Agates, “and we must take every precaution.”

Presently they were joined by several of the leaders, and the plan for the morrow was discussed with much animation.

“To me,” said Britomar, “it seems the wisest course

to concentrate the main body of our men at this portion of the wall where the attack is directed. Then if a breach of any magnitude is made we will be strong enough to resist the enemy's entrance."

"Nevertheless," responded Agates, "I dislike weakening the other points of the wall. It must be remembered that we have three gates, though the one facing the east is unlikely to be attacked."

Aneroestes trembled, for this was the gate he was to open.

"It is our only way of retreat should the city fall," continued the chief. "It is by this road that our women may escape."

"Is it the only way?" asked the mountaineer.

"There is one other, but this is sufficient. The distance to the Padus is not great. On the far side of the river rafts are concealed of sufficient size to transport all who may wish to go."

"But," persisted Aneroestes, "the enemy may cut off this means of retreat."

"It is not likely."

"There should be no risks. The Carthaginian is

wily, and will surely cut off every avenue of escape. No gate will pass his notice."

"You speak so earnestly that one might almost believe you to be positive of the enemy's plans," said Concolitanus.

"I know the ways of the General," said Aneroestes quietly, "and I warn you to depend on no ordinary road to escape."

"We may not wish to escape," said one.

"But the women?"

"They, too, may prefer to remain with us. But the city is not yet taken and the walls are still stout. The engines of the enemy may make further breaches but we will rebuild them as we have done to-night, and when all else fails we can stop the way with our bodies."

It was Concolitanus who uttered the reassuring words, and the effect was as wine to those who heard him.

Aneroestes admired his courage, but he hated him for his attentions to Ducaria. He wished to save her—to save the city—but the rattle of slave chains resounded in his ears, and peering into the inky dark-

ness he fancied he saw those fair young men of his tribe—his brothers—writhing under the lash—bleeding, maimed, and praying for death.

Morning broke, and with it came the significant noise of preparation for another day's warfare.

What with anxiety and fear the Taurini had rested little, but renewed bravery came with the sunlight. A feeling of hope again pervaded the city. Though the wall had sustained serious damage during the previous day's storming, continuous work on it the whole night had repaired the breaches as well as strengthened the adjoining portions which had become weakened from constant jar and vibration. The result was satisfactory, and all were pleased save Agates, who rightly judged that repeated assaults of such a nature could not long be withstood. He hoped that the messengers sent to the friendly tribes on the opposite bank of the Padus would reach their destination safely ; but he feared the vigilance of Hannibal's sentries.

Aneroestes watched the approach of morn with burning eyes that had not closed all night ; and yet he felt no need of rest. It was on this day he was to open the gate to Himilco and so give the Carthaginian

army possession of the city. When he undertook this mission he had felt no compunction, for the Taurini were little more than strangers to him. He was, besides, striving for the freedom of those young men of his tribe who even now writhed in slave chains. The thought of this nerved his failing determination. Hannibal's wrath he could brave if Ducaria might be saved, but he shrank from breaking his vow when he remembered the tortures that would be visited on his fellows.

He watched the preparations being carried on in the waking camp with feelings altogether new to his disposition. Knowing that he must not disappoint those who were dependent on him, he at the same time found it impossible to leave Ducaria to the mercy of the soldiers. True, he might save her, provided she would allow him to do so, but there came the difficulty. Were she even to suspect his intentions her indignation would be aroused, and it would then be but natural for her to announce his treachery to the whole city.

Never before had such a battle raged within him. Hannibal had freed him from slavery and he had

sworn to be faithful to the great General. This alone might not have proved a strong hold on a warrior of violent temperament, but he loved the men of his own tribe and he could not deny them the chance of obtaining their liberty. Furthermore, he knew the city would have to fall—if not that day, on the morrow or the day after, provided no reinforcements were received from beyond the Padus.

Though he stood alone he was conscious of being watched.

While his counsels were well received by Agates and the head men of the city, the spirit of caution never forsook them. Aneroestes knew, however, that when the time came, in the midst of the storming he could easily slip away unnoticed and perform the task assigned to him.

Slowly the sun rose above the top of the gentle Ligurian hills, and the murmuring Padus, so dark and impenetrable a few moments before, now danced in the flood of yellow light. The Duria, ending its course a few stades below, also partook of the radiance and dazzled the eyes of those who gazed upon it.

The Carthaginian camp was distinctly visible to those in the city, and it was seen that though the day was but newly born all haste was being made to renew the attack. Suddenly a shrill cry was heard from the watchers on the walls—a cry expressive of rage, sorrow, and disappointment. It was answered by the jeers and laughter of the enemy. The cause was easily discernible. Two rough crosses faced the rising sun, and on each was nailed a man. The Taurini recognised the bodies as those of the spies who had left the city in the night to make their way across the Padus.

Aneroestes was greatly troubled, for he now knew that all hope for the city was at an end. He was sad at heart, yet he felt that the hopelessness of the situation made his projected action less difficult.

His meditations were interrupted by the approach of Concolitanus, who accosted him maliciously.

"Your countenance reflects not joy," he said. "Does fear possess the warrior of the mountains at sight of the spies nailed to the crosses? It is an unpleasant form of death, and one to be avoided."

"I have no cause for fear, and therefore fear not."

"You do not, then, anticipate such a death? Is Hannibal more merciful to those who play him false?"

"I fight for whom I will," answered Anerostes sullenly. "While I hold a sword none shall make me prisoner."

"You talk bravely, yet I doubt your good purpose."

"It matters not to me. Others more worthy believe in me."

"You mean Agates."

"He is one."

"And Ducaria—is she another?" asked Concolitanus, with a sneer that ill concealed an intense hatred.

The mountaineer laughed and retorted—

"Your anger proves that she is, though you would have had her suspect me. I thank her and value her trust. She shall always find in me a champion."

"I would that I could fight and kill you," hissed the Taurinian. "Ducaria needs no champion beyond her own people, and none other while I live."

"Are you, then, her accepted lover?" asked

Aneroestes tantalisingly, for he knew that Concolitanus had thus far pressed his suit in vain.

The approach of Agates, with Britomar and several others, checked a continuance of the discussion ; but the two young men exchanged looks of defiance and dislike.

"The enemy watches us closely," said the chief. "It is unfortunate that both our messengers should have been captured. His soldiers must surround the city, and in that case we shall have to rely altogether on ourselves."

"We are as many as the enemy and none the less brave," remarked Concolitanus.

"There may be nothing to fear if the Carthaginian pursues ordinary means ; but he is subtle and may attack us unawares," and Agates looked steadily at the opposing forces.

"Already they are preparing for the attack," said Britomar. "I will proceed to my place and be in readiness when the first blow is struck."

Just then a cry of surprise broke from Aneroestes.

"What is it ?" asked the chief.

"See you naught ?"

"I do indeed see the whole Carthaginian army stretched out before me ; but there are no more than were repulsed yesterday."

"But yesterday there was one ram ; to-day there are two, and even now both are advancing."

"That increases the danger," muttered Britomar.

The others strained their eyes in the direction of the engines and showed an uneasiness that had not been before apparent.

"We will be attacked front and rear," exclaimed one warrior excitedly.

"Then must we divide our forces," declared the chief, with energy. "But at present that will not be necessary, as both rams are bearing towards the part of the wall that was attacked yesterday. Hasten, Britomar, and see that everything is in readiness. I shall join you presently. It is true," he added to those near by, "that the enemy now have two rams, and the dangers of yesterday will be doubled ; but we number full as many as our opponents, and should the walls fall we can defend ourselves like brave men."

"And the women ?" murmured Aneroestes.

"They may escape by the small gate facing the Padus. The Carthaginian is concentrating his attack on the front. He has no knowledge of our rafts and believes escape across the river impossible."

But the mountaineer shook his head.

"All gates are watched," he said. "Two of your most wary spies failed in the night to pass the sentries, and what hope can there be for women in the light of day?"

"What, then, would you advise?"

"Undermine the wall where it faces the fork of the rivers and construct a passage. If the women are to escape by the rear gate a start should be made at once; but the escort should be little short of the whole force."

"The mountaineer is much concerned over the fate of our women," said Concolitanus.

"Too much so," added another.

"Our women will not fly until the last," shouted a third.

"It may then be too late," retorted Aneroeses.

Angry eyes were turned upon this man who openly predicted defeat.

"To-day at least we are safe," said the chief, "so we need not fear for the present."

Aneroestes turned away. He knew that Himilco and his men must already be secreted among the trees bordering the Padus.

By this time the testudenes had come within short range. The head men of the Taurini dispersed to their several stations to be ready for the first attack. It was not long in coming, and the besieged soon saw that the whole force was to be directed against the one spot. Some felt despondent at the dread fate of the two messengers whose faces, twisted in death, seemed to utter a warning to those in the city, but the greater number soon forgot the significant sign in the heat of action.

"We can build as high crosses as the Carthaginian," shouted a muscular giant of the tribe, and those within hearing laughed at the remark. "And," he added, "before night we will have more than two to hang on them."

Assurance soon spread among those grasping a sword, for an active defence was to be adopted and at least one sally would be made.

All capable of dealing a blow were assembled at the threatened points. Some few were weighted with years and others again suffered from immaturity ; but a burning determination shone in every eye and strengthened the weakest arm.

They were splendid-looking warriors, these Taurini ; tall, supple, and powerfully built—points which were particularly noticeable in the more energetic. Some were completely ungirt save for a cloth about their loins, while others were content to remain naked to the waist. The fair skin of their bodies blended artistically with the thick yellow hair piled in towers on the tops of their heads, while several permitted it to float loosely about their shoulders.

Aneroestes gazed at them in admiration, but he knew that though brave and fearless they would be no match for Hannibal's subtlety, and he regretted having been chosen to open the gate, for he loved the sight of valiant warriors.

Numberless rocks, blocks of wood, and tree trunks had been heaped along the wall, and men were posted close together to hurl the massive pieces upon the besiegers. Beside them stood the slingers, with others lightly armed.

Agates hoped that this arrangement would keep the attack at a distance.

Quantities of darts steeped in pitch were also held in readiness, and it was expected that a thick flight would find some dry spots on the testudenes. Some stood behind in the protection of the walls, for their services would be required in repelling a storming, while those wielding heavier weapons were assembled below, as the making of a breach would likely be followed by an assault on the exposed part. Some were armed with iron-tipped spears of ash in addition to several javelins. Oblong shields of brass furnished them with a means of defence. The main number favoured the Gallic sword, which, though useless for thrusting, was wonderfully effective in the hands of a powerful man. Others again carried heavy clubs, studded with spikes, and for one of these Aneroestes had gladly exchanged his sword. It was the kind of weapon he had used in the wilds of the mountains.

He noticed that the women of the tribe were busy preparing food and carrying it close to the walls so that while fighting the soldiers could refresh themselves. Among them he distinguished Ducaria, who

turned away in confusion as their eyes met. How greatly that glance shook his resolve he was afraid to think.

His whole being was afire with excitement.

Hannibal's army had, since the early morning, been drawn up in line of battle in the same order as the day previous, save that the slingers did not head the van, but were stationed on either side in equal numbers. The whole, too, was much nearer, almost within range of the Taurinian weapons.

Desultory shots from the slings were indulged in without any effect save to increase the fervor of battle that had settled upon the men of both sides.

When everything was made ready in the ranks of the Carthaginians the two rams, under cover of stout testudenes, advanced slowly to the attack. The point chosen was the same that gave way the day previous.

And now a hush overspread all, for the besieging party knew not what steps would be taken by the defenders, while, on the other hand, the latter were impressed with the magnitude of the engines.

It seemed as though one and all realised that a decisive battle would be fought.

Nervous fingers closed more tightly on weapons, and the bravest breathed more quickly.

The testudenes did not halt until within sixty feet of the wall, but before the rams could be got to work a shower of blazing darts was hurled against the leather coverings.

The war shouts of the Taurini broke upon the stillness with such force and defiance that the men of the opposing host looked askance and muttered among themselves, "This is no ordinary enemy ; we will lose many ere the city is taken."

But Hannibal and his officers smiled.

They waited for the hour of noon, when Himilco and his troop would effect an entrance at the rear gate.

"I trust the mountaineer will not fail us," said Maharbal.

"He will not," answered Hannibal, "provided he lives."

'And if he has been suspected and is unable to open the gates?'

'Our loss will then be greater than I had expected; but it appears to me that had he suffered death his body would even now adorn the walls.'

"And you think he will not play you false? Ligurians and Gauls are to be trusted little."

"Perhaps it is as you say, but he would gain nothing by treachery. He knows my strength, and the weakness of the Taurini. Furthermore, the thought of his suffering comrades will bind him to his promise."

Hannibal had been standing at the head of the Iberian infantry, but at a sign from him a servant brought forward his horse and held it while he mounted.

"Come, Maharbal," he said, "we will advance yet a little nearer to the walls, for the rams are about to begin work. And see, the enemy is greeting them with blazing darts, hoping to burn the coverings. But they are proof."

"I pray you not to advance any nearer," exclaimed Gisco, seeing the purpose of the chief. "Your figure is conspicuous and will be marked by the enemy."

But Hannibal only laughed and pressed on, closely followed by Maharbal.

The rain of fire had no visible effect upon the testudenes, and in a few moments the first blow was

struck—a powerful, deliberate blow, propelled by five score pairs of arms, causing the whole masonry to tremble.

The two rams were about thirty feet apart, and the obvious intention of the Carthaginians was to demolish the section in between. This, with the several additional feet on either side that would fall with the rest, would make a dangerous gap.

And now the blows followed one after the other in rapid succession. In answer to each pieces of stone varying in size became severed from their places. They fell outward and inward, raising wreaths of dust that troubled the eyes of the defenders.

The part of the wall that had been rebuilt seemed to stand the attack better than the old, as the clay was still wet and did not crumble from the constant vibration.

It was only a matter of time before the breach would be made, and in truth the Taurini were as anxious as the enemy to come to a hand-to-hand conflict. But the exchange of missiles continued without abatement, for with the opening of the attack the Baleares had advanced and poured showers of

stones into the city. Many of those mounted on the walls fell, and while the Taurinian slingers answered the besiegers they hardly inflicted as severe punishment. Agates, noting this, commanded his men not to expose themselves needlessly, and the stones danced menacingly against the battlements.

Concolitanus had chosen to post himself at the point of attack, and had hurled more than one javelin with telling force. Clustered about him were many choice warriors, and he had induced Aneroestes to stand near by, for he wished to exhibit his prowess to the mountaineer.

Amidst the thickest flights of stones and darts he laughed carelessly and remained ever watchful for an advantage. Suddenly his eyes blazed more brightly, and his thin nostrils expanded in excitement.

"Is that not Hannibal on the black horse?" he asked his companions.

All looked in the direction indicated, and those who knew him recognised the Carthaginian general.

"It is he," said Aneroestes.

Concolitanus seized a javelin, but the mountaineer forestalled him and had hurled one before any

guessed his intent. It fell short by only a few feet and all exclaimed, for the distance was beyond that which could be covered by an ordinary man.

"You throw well," hissed Concolitanus, "but I would you had left the work for me."

"I did my best," answered Aneroestes. "When he again approaches you may perhaps do better."

"He will not again approach after that warning," muttered the Taurinian warrior in an undertone, while the others applauded the mountaineer's attempt.

CHAPTER VIII

AT THE GATE

WHILE the Taurini suffered from the missiles of the enemy they fought with unabated fury and continued to pour the blazing darts upon the roofs of the testudenes. The perpetuity of this form of attack eventually began to tell, and in spite of the precautions taken by the Carthaginians smoke denoted that a hole had become burnt in one of the coverings. Though small in dimensions, it was soon enlarged to such an extent that the engine had to be withdrawn in order to undergo certain repairs. This slight advantage greatly encouraged the defenders and they redoubled their efforts.

Suddenly the lines of the army parted and a score of sappers appeared in the wake of a body of soldiers, fully armed and holding their oblong shields before

and above them so as to form a veritable testudo of metal. The sappers carried no visible weapons, but each one was supplied with a pickaxe, and it was at once evident that they were to hasten the work of the rams.

The whole advanced at a quick, steady pace that was uninterrupted by the resistance of those on the battlements. For with the near approach of the strange body the Taurini were able to hurl the heavier javelins to advantage, while the trunks and jagged rocks greeted them when within the shadow of the wall.

Numbers fell, borne down by the weight of the missiles or stunned by the force of the javelins, but no gaps were left in the formation as it pressed onward. Supported by an unceasing rain of stones discharged from the slings of the Baleares, a position was taken up at the foot of the battlements immediately between the points attacked by the rams.

Amid the din of the battle the clink of the picks soon rang out clear and distinct.

The soldiers forming the guard were powerful men

of Libya and Iberia, and failed not to maintain the covering over the workers, though ponderous stones were rolled down on them without cessation.

Then the second ram which had been re-covered, moved forward, and as its blows joined in with the destructive work of the other, the chief men of the city admitted that the wall would not long stand. Already a small breach had been made by constant battering, and the falling away of the clay signified a more serious mishap. Nevertheless, the Taurini continued their efforts, and in every way endeavoured to repel the assault.

The more impetuous demanded that a sally should be made, but this was impossible, as Hannibal had wisely chosen to direct his attack against a part of the wall some distance from any gate. Consequently a movement from within would be met by the full strength of the army. Thus the workers of the engines and those with the picks were certain of being free from molestation.

Aneroestes had rendered valuable assistance in raising an inner wall, but he handled the stones nervously, for the hour was close at hand when he

was to open the gate to Himilco. The advance of the sappers was the first signal, the second and last was to be the falling of the wall. This he knew would not be long in happening.

His eager eyes sought for Ducaria among the women, but he was unable to distinguish her, so great was the confusion.

He wondered if any of the enemy's missiles had pierced her soft skin, but he writhed when he pictured her in the hands of the Carthaginian soldiery.

The fatal time drew near, but he worked on, tearing his hands on the rough edges of the stones—panting and wild-eyed with suppressed excitement.

Three hours had passed since the opening of the day's attack and the struggle had become maddening. The dull boom of the rams thundered throughout the place and caused the timid to look longingly towards the broad Padus that flowed between them and safety.

The clink of the sappers' picks was now scarcely heard, so great was the tumult, but the ruinous work went on, impeded at times, though unchecked. Clay balls, smooth pebbles and arrows whizzed through the

air and rattled against the turrets or found more yielding marks on the bodies of furious warriors, while from the city were hurled all manner of missiles—blazing darts that shot forward like comets, iron-pointed javelins, and huge rocks which rolled upon those beneath.

The rams were being worked magnificently. Stark naked, the men bent to their task with shouts, and each blow, seemingly harder than the one previous, echoed the success of their efforts.

Hannibal was confident that the tottering wall would soon give way, and not wishing to lose more of his soldiers than was necessary, he recalled the sappers, who by this time had successfully undermined a large portion.

The rams would easily complete the work.

Agates likewise saw this, but inner walls were being rapidly raised behind the threatened places, and he did not fear for the present.

All the heavy-armed soldiers were held in readiness. Aneroestes was among the number, his war-club grasped firmly and the upper part of his body freed of all clothing. He had as yet had little oppor-

tunity to slip away, though he had not sought to do so. The reappearance of Ducaria held him to the spot, and she had smiled on him as he laboured.

The picture of his suffering kinsmen faded from his mind.

At last they who were waiting for the closer struggle saw the weakened section of the wall totter on its foundations, then fall inward with a mighty crash that drowned all minor sounds. The atmosphere became clouded with a grimy dust. When it cleared a gap thirty or more feet in width was revealed to the two armies, and for a moment the sight appalled the defenders. But they stood close to their inner wall and met the fierce onslaught of the enemy.

And now the air became filled with shrieks and yells that chilled the blood of women, but wrought the combatants to greater fury. Though a low wall separated them, they in reality stood face to face, for many of the Taurini had rushed forward to meet the storming party and engaged with them almost before their feet trod the soil of the city.

For hours both sides had vented an unquenchable

hatred at long range, but now sword crossed sword and the clanging blows rang out in hideous discord.

Eager warriors, assailing and defending, poured into the breach, but the latter had the advantage of being able to concentrate a greater number without being subjected to attack from above, and the Carthaginians suffered much from this quarter. Massive stones crushed many midway in their advance, and well-aimed javelins pierced the stoutest armour. The long ash spears tipped with metal were used with great effect by the Taurini, though the more aggressive wielded swords similar to those of their antagonists. These consisted mainly of Insubres. Shields of varied shapes littered the ground, for in their excitement to kill these weapons of defence hampered the fighters' movements.

Hannibal viewed the scene with satisfaction. He commanded on horseback not far from the breach—an imposing figure in his armour of golden scales that reflected prismatic beams with every motion. A gorgeous helmet, surmounted by a crest of horsehair, encased his head and made him the more conspicuous. The soldiers were inspired by his near presence, for

he was one of those rare men who ever win the love of their inferiors without lessening their power under them. He had ordered a body of Gauls to first storm the breach, as he wished to spare his own more valuable infantry, and these new-made allies bade fair to do the work to his liking. In all respects were they equal to the defenders, and racial hate intensified their energy to the point of brilliant action. Scores fell, but others were ever ready to fill their places, and the battle gathered in fury as it progressed.

The Taurini were encouraged by the way they held their ground and shouted defiance as they grappled with the enemy, for some chose this primitive method the better to show the depth of their feelings.

Much striking had turned the edges of the swords, but heavy blows dealt with the dulled blades crushed skulls and severed bones.

Forgetful or regardless of his mission, Aneroestes fought in the van, and his mighty club, tracing rapid circles in the air, descended upon the head and shoulders of more than one Gaul with deadly effect. Assailed on all sides he seemed possessed of an energy to fight an army, and those near by marvelled. But.

suddenly he ceased and stood with gaping mouth and eyes fixed upon the breach. His strange behaviour was not noticed by the struggling warriors, nor did they see him slowly withdraw from their midst.

With the fever of war upon him he had caught sight of Hannibal, and the glimpse of that imposing figure transformed his advance into a retreat. He saw in the stern visage no mercy for those of his own tribe should he fail in his duty, and he shivered at the thought of the tortures he would bring upon them. Without further consideration he made his way to the rear. Once beyond the line he hurried towards the small gate, for the time was passed when he should have been there.

As he sped through the city he took no heed of the old men who had crawled to the doors of the huts, and anxious to know how the battle progressed, called out to him in shrill, quavering voices. Neither did he heed the cries of the women, who beat their bare breasts in anguish, and invoked the protection of the gods for themselves and their helpless babes. A boy ran out as though to intercept him, but he roughly pushed him aside, and a wail of pain mingled with

the more distant noises. Once he tripped and fell heavily, but he was up again in an instant, and continued the more madly on his course.

And all the time he retained his club, for something told him he would have need of it ere Himilco entered the city.

Eventually he came within sight of the gate, and the two guards awaited his approach in wonderment, for he seemed scarce human and his speed was terrific.

"Has the city fallen?" cried out one.

But Anerostes vouchsafed no reply, and raised his club as though to strike. Seeing this, both men rushed at him with their swords, but he jumped to one side and brought his weapon down upon the man nearest him. He guarded, but the blow smashed his sword and struck his shoulder with no light force. With a cry of terror he fled, and the mountaineer was left face to face with the remaining guard, who with commendable alacrity reached at him and pierced his arm. But in doing so he left himself exposed, and a crunching blow battered his head into a pulp. Then the victor ran to the wall and waved his arms violently, for this was the signal agreed upon.

Aneroestes paused for breath, and the noise of the battle smote upon his awakening senses.

The excitement at an end, he began to think more of his surroundings. But the clatter of the approaching troops now became audible, and he was about to advance towards the gate when his arm was seized in a nervous grasp, and, turning in amazement—for he had heard no footsteps—he found himself confronted by Ducaria.

For a moment he gazed at her ; then his eyes fell. Her face was stern, and he guessed that she knew his intentions.

It was for him to speak, but he said nothing.

The girl had evidently been exerting herself in no small degree, for her breath came quickly and in gasps.

“What is it you are doing?” she asked. “A Taurinian warrior lies dead at your feet, crushed by your club, and another flies wounded through the city proclaiming you as a spy and a traitor. What means it all?”

Then Aneroestes answered without looking up—

“I am in the service of Hannibal, and have agreed

to open this gate to a body of his soldiers. Even now they are near at hand. If you listen you will hear them."

"Traitor!" cried the girl. "You shall not do it."

"I will—I must! Hannibal relies on me, and I have sworn by the gods to do his bidding."

"And will you sacrifice the lives of brave men by treachery? Will you give the women into the hands of the soldiers, and have children slain before the eyes of their mothers. You, who expressed concern over our fate? And I believed in you though Concolitanus warned me to beware!"

With hair dishevelled and eyes aglow with anger she inveighed against him, while her grip tightened on a dagger that she drew from the folds of her gown.

The mountaineer saw the subtle movement but expressed no fear.

"I acted not for myself," he said, "nor for riches would I betray the city, but I am bound to the Carthaginian. Thirty young men of my tribe are held prisoners by him as I was, and their bodies suffer from hunger and the scourge. They also mourn for their lost liberty. If I am false to my

promise, they, not I, will suffer, while my success will break the slave chains that bind them. I can do naught but open the gate. Even now the soldiers are outside demanding admittance, and I hear the voice of Himilco. Let me pass, I pray you," and Aneroestes attempted to push her aside.

But Ducaria only looked the more fierce.

"I will not let you pass," she answered. "You strive for the freedom of your brethren, and by doing so you enslave mine. I will not loose my hold while strength is in me. I saw you in the fight striving nobly against many—then I saw you stop as if smitten with fear, and when you hastened away I followed you, though you outran me. Woman though I am, I shall defend the city as long as life lasts."

"Then kill me. In this way only can I fail to fulfil my vow. Your hand fondles a dagger. Let it smite my heart and so rid me of my task. But I pray you hasten, for Himilco will not long remain patient."

Ducaria stared at him in astonishment. She raised her arm, but only for an instant. Then her fingers relaxed their hold and the weapon fell to the ground.

"It would be kind to strike," whispered Aneroestes.

"I cannot."

"Death alone frees me. To save the city I must not spare myself," and, bending down the warrior picked up the fallen dagger.

But Ducaria stayed his arm and looked rather than spoke her pleadings.

The mountaineer fell on his knees.

"I will be your servant," said he huskily. "For your sake I will not open this gate, even though my brethren suffer for my faithlessness."

Ducaria seized his hand. He rose to his feet, and for a few moments they stood silently with fingers interlaced.

All the time the Carthaginians without beat upon the gate and demanded instant admittance.

Suddenly a number of soldiers, pale-faced and out of breath, accompanied by as many women and children, came hastening towards the exit.

Unmindful of themselves, both Ducaria and Aneroestes attempted to stay the flight, but there were too many to be influenced by what was said, or to take note of the clamour without. The barriers

were dragged away, and as the gate flew back Himilco and his men appeared in the opening. The fugitives halted aghast, then, turning, fled in the direction from which they had come, followed by a party of horsemen.

Himilco's keen eyes at once detected Anerostes, who held Ducaria as though she were with him by force.

"You kept us long waiting," he said, for he could speak the Gallic language tolerably.

"I was attacked after giving the signal," answered the mountaineer, and he pointed to the corpse of the guard. "Besides, the fugitives interfered with me."

"And yet you seem to have benefited by their presence," remarked Himilco meaningly, as his lustful eyes devoured the outlines of Ducaria's supple figure, "for you have captured a woman whose beauty I have never seen excelled. She befits not your station. Take her to my tent and I shall there reward you."

"But I do not wish to sell her," expostulated Anerostes.

Himilco reined in his horse for a moment, though

the others, with the exception of his attendants, had gone on, and he smiled yet more unpleasantly.

"Take her to my tent," he repeated, "and do you, Cincibil," he added, turning to a Gaul, "accompany this man;" after which he rode on to the scene of battle.

Meanwhile Ducaria had crept close to Aneroestes, for she gathered the meaning of Himilco's order, and as the cavalcade galloped forward she looked up appealingly at this strange man who stood beside her. He said nothing, and seemed intent on the last writhings of a fleeing Taurinian whom the passing soldiers had struck down.

The Gaul Cincibil had dismounted and now advanced leisurely towards the pair. He was a large man, and smiled at the consternation expressed on Ducaria's face.

"Come," he said. "You must change your lover, and we had best move at once."

But she shrank away from him, while her eyes again appealed to Aneroestes.

"Come," continued the Gaul impatiently. "The orders of Himilco will not wait," and with a rapid

movement he seized the girl by the arm. She cried out as though in pain.

Aneroestes turned at the sound.

"Let her alone," he said.

Cincibil first looked surprised, then burst into a laugh.

"I have my orders," he retorted, "and they came from higher than you. If you refuse to accompany the girl I will carry her off myself. Come," and he more roughly took hold of her.

But with a growl like that of a wild beast Aneroestes threw himself upon the man, and before any resistance could be offered, buried a dagger in his throat.

The blood spurted on to his face as he hurled the body from him. It fell to the ground a corpse, for the blow had been well aimed.

Ducaria looked on aghast.

"Why did you do it?" she asked. "Himilco will surely be avenged on you."

"I care not. The man persecuted you. I will not deliver you to Himilco. Tell me where you can find safety, and I shall take you there."

"Beyond the Padus we have kinsmen, and I might with them find refuge. But I cannot leave my father

—perchance he is wounded,” and the tears came to her eyes.

Then a sudden idea occurred to Aneroestes. Rushing forward to where the Taurinian whom he had slain lay, he tore off the man’s clothes, and came back with them.

“There is yet a chance of escape,” he said. “Attire yourself in these things. As a youth you may not attract notice.”

And while she wavered he pressed her the more eagerly, so that at last she consented to make the change while he kept watch.

“For,” he explained, “you will only sadden your father by remaining. To avoid Himilco and the Carthaginian soldiers you must do as I say.”

But when she rejoined him disguised as a youth he made no attempt to conceal a deep disappointment that had settled on his face.

“What is it?” she asked tremblingly.

“We cannot escape. I see bands of Numidians in the field between here and the Padus. If we try to pass them they will surely strike us down.”

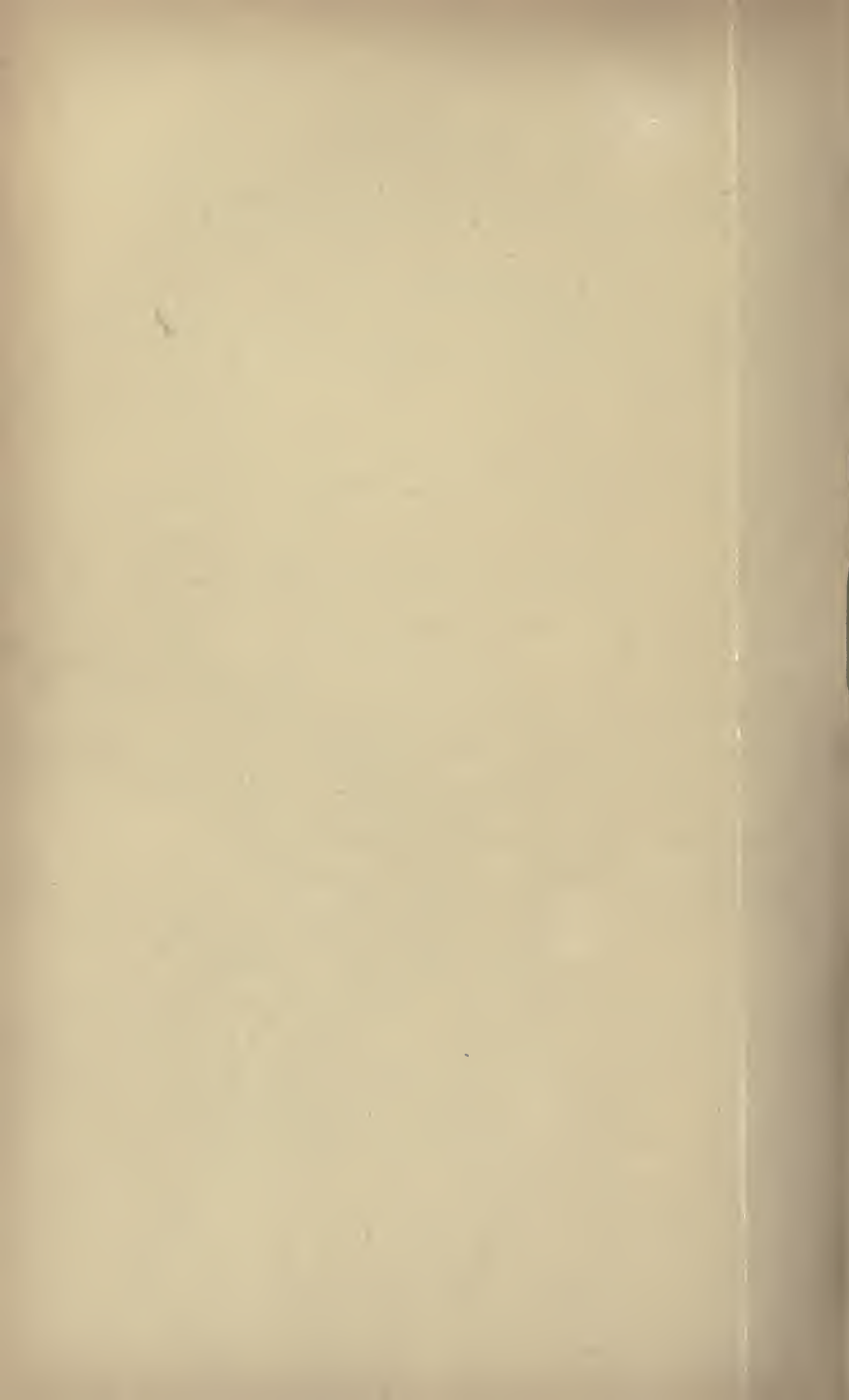
“What, then, is to be done?”

"We must proceed to the Carthaginian camp, and trust to your disguise."

"And if Himilco discovers me?"

"You have your dagger."

Ducaria understood.



CHAPTER IX

THE DOWNFALL OF TAURASIA

MEANWHILE the contest at the breach had been carried on without abatement and neither side could claim any distinct advantage. Many fell, both of the besieged and the besiegers. Under the careful direction of Agates a worthy defence was made, and the fiercest onslaughts were repeatedly repulsed. Those who had at first regarded the falling of the wall as the end of the storming became filled with surprise and admiration, while the more fearful among the Taurini gathered confidence with the progress of events.

But as yet Hannibal had not sent his own tried soldiers to the fore, and with the exception of the slingers, who occupied a position of comparative safety, he relied solely on the Insubres. These allies bravely

bore the force of the tremendous resistance offered, and by their great numbers gave no ground, but the General soon saw that they gained nothing, and he awaited the more eagerly the arrival of Himilco. A strong body of veteran infantry composed of Libyans and warriors from Iberia—fierce Cantabrians and hardy mountaineers from the wilds of Lusitania and Asturia—stood in readiness to rush forward when the signal should be given. So great was their impatience that they seemed like horses chafing at the bits rather than men entering upon a sanguinary conflict.

Presently it was seen that the Insubres were being forced back through the breach, and strive as they might it was impossible for them to maintain their position. At this the shouts of the Taurini redoubled, and headed by Concolitanus the whole available force was hurled against the receding invader.

It was an overwhelming charge, born of patriotism and desperation, and could scarcely be withstood.

Amazed at a strength that was quite unlooked for at this stage of the battle, the Insubres paused, and the pause was succeeded by a wavering throughout the compact mass.

White, glistening bodies, flecked with blood and foam, retreated, stumbling and in disorder, while after them pressed others equally naked, begrimed with dust and perspiration, striking the more fiercely through being freed from immediate attack.

For a moment it looked like a victory for the Taurini, but as the broken lines of the Gauls disappeared before the precipitous onslaught, the choicest infantry of the Carthaginian army lined up in place. The linen cuirasses, bare shoulders and purple bordered tunic of the Iberian troops distinguished them from the more dusky Africans, who were protected by leather jackets studded with metal plates, and carried shields somewhat smaller than the large semicircular ones favoured by their companions in arms.

The savage joy with which an engagement with this body was received rapidly underwent a transformation, for sounds from within the city proclaimed to the panting, wild-eyed warriors that the enemy was advancing on them from the rear as well as from the front. In desperate confusion some turned to meet the unexpected attack, while others attempted to maintain order.

Amid all these diverse purposes the Carthaginians charged. The warriors in the van were armed with long spears, and were thus able to reach their opponents while yet out of range of the swords pitted against them. A detachment of slingers at the same time moved forward, and the Taurini were subjected to the showers of well-aimed stones. But in the face of these odds the majority fought with unabated vigour though defeat could not be far distant. Each warrior looked only to his nearest foe, now dodging a spear thrust, anon parrying a sword cut, though at times only to fall by one of the countless missiles whizzing through the air.

The injured sank to the ground bleeding and unnoticed, while others pressed forward to fill the gaps.

But the fight closed in on the gallant band. Himilco's force, while not numerous, was well chosen, and when he charged the rear with heavy-armed cavalry and vigorous foot soldiers, the formation of the defenders became demoralised.

Concolitanus had kept his place in front since the opening of the attack, and he was the mark for many angered opponents. He had discarded all weapons

except a club of ponderous size, studded with spikes. This he wielded with the ease of a light sword, and with far more deadly effect. He was wounded in the head, and the blood streaking his fair hair had matted it in places, while a tiny stream that trickled from the right side of the smooth white chest, so beautiful in its nudity, showed that his skill had not saved him altogether. None seemed able to check his devastating advance, though many tried. A sinewy Celtiberian of reputed prowess crowded past his fellows, but the Taurinian champion shouted defiantly and rushed forward. It was a strange duel, for while one fought with a club, the other relied on a fine-tempered blade. A thrust in the shoulder brought the blood to the surface, and made the third wound sustained by Concolitanus. He glared at his adversary with steely blue eyes, and the great club made several rapid revolutions. The other smiled with confidence and thrust again. It was well aimed, but Concolitanus succeeded in evading it, and the next instant the Celtiberian sank to the ground a mangled heap.

The victor unconsciously placed one foot on the corpse as though to continue the struggle. Then

realising that his antagonist no longer breathed he once more threw himself into the fray.

But at last an organised attempt was made against him under the orders of an Iberian captain, who exhorted his men to finish the troublesome warrior. The order was quickly put into practice. Intercepted, attacked on all sides, and separated from his companions, Concolitanus found it impossible to retreat in any direction. His quick eye detected the confusion in the rear and Himilco's victorious cavalry. In the front a wall of soldiers faced him. Escape was impossible even had he wished it. He knew his time to die was at hand, and he did not shrink from his fate. But not for a moment did he cease his exertions, though he was sorely wounded. His breathing had become laboured. The gleam of swords dazzled him and a ridge of steel bore down upon his head. It was then he swung his massive club for the last time. But instead of striking with it he hurled it at the officer some feet distant who was urging the men to their task. There was a swift, buzzing sound, followed by a dull thud, for the weapon had hit its mark. Concolitanus had killed his last victim. He only laughed

as sharp spears entered his body, and the smile had not faded from the full lips when the eyes glazed in death.

All organised resistance was now at an end. Earlier in the day, almost immediately after the arrival of Himilco, the noble Agates had fallen, and Britomar, who then assumed command, had not long survived him.

For a while the desperate efforts of those in the van encouraged the remainder, but hope disappeared before the onslaughts of the enemy.

Many continued to fight from necessity, for, surrounded on all sides, escape was beyond their reach. Those more fortunately situated fled precipitately. As the gate entered by Himilco and his troops was well guarded, the fugitives made their exit by the northern entrance that faced the Duria.

The battle was at an end but the slaughter had only begun. The feast was prepared, and the Carthaginians made ready to gorge themselves.

Finding all hope gone, the more desperate of the Taurini raised their swords and, rushing at the victors, prepared to end their lives in a manner befitting

warriors. Some were felled by darts and stones before they could engage, while others, unmindful of being surrounded on all sides, were struck down from quarters least expected.

A miserable remnant at last threw down their arms and besought mercy. Writhing and gesticulating they grovelled on the corpse-covered ground, while their shrieks mingled horribly with the other noises of the struggle. But the Carthaginians only took the more careful aim before dealing the death stroke. Few of the oppressed were able to pierce a way through the wall of antagonistic humanity. Some were taken prisoners, but they were not always saved from the wrath of the more savage.

Plunder followed in the wake of victory. Each body was quickly stripped of all ornaments, and many of these Ligurians wore gold in profusion. In their greed the victors jerked the rings from the ears with a haste that brought with it pieces of clammy flesh. Some even severed the hands with their knives to more readily possess the massive bracelets that encircled wrists and arms.

At the opening of the campaign Hannibal had

promised all the spoils to the soldiers, inclusive of female captives. Consequently there was a general move in the direction of the gates. As the frenzied inhabitants thought only of escape they offered no resistance within the city, and the horrors of massacre were there perpetrated on old men and children.

Taurasia was several stades distant from the Duria, and the intervening territory, comprising an almost treeless plain, became dotted with fugitives. All hastened towards the river, ignorant of whether any means of escape there awaited them. Through the promptitude of several warriors a rough raft had been got into place, but it was much too small to accommodate the fleeing multitude. Many plunged into the stream without thought of its width, and but a meagre proportion reached the opposite bank. Desperate swimmers attempted to cling to the raft midway in its course, but it was already overladen, and those propelling it smote the retaining hands with the poles.

Meanwhile the Numidians who had been dispatched in pursuit soon overtook the greater number, and slew all the males without distinction. The old women

shared a similar fate, but the younger ones were taken prisoners and guarded carefully.

In the city a wild disorder reigned. The Beleaes had been among the first to crowd through the unguarded breach, and with lustful eyes they eagerly sought the women—those tall, fair-haired creatures, whom for the past three days they had looked forward to possessing. The gold and other precious belongings amassed by the tribe had little attraction for them. Like so many animals they hunted for their prey in all the huts, shouting with demoniacal glee when an unusually fine prize was captured, and wantonly slaying all males that came within their reach.

A small party of these Islanders espied a young mother stealing away with a boy and girl. Uttering wild yells they gave chase. The terrified woman looked back fearfully and quickened her steps, though there was no refuge near by. Loathsome hands soon stayed her, while others more murderous seized her children. They were too young to realise their danger, but child-like they cried. One ill-favoured giant drew his dagger across the throat of the boy,

and the warm blood gushed out upon the hands of the supplicating mother as she vainly tried to ward off the stroke. The small, white form sank to the ground. It quivered convulsively for a few moments ere it settled in its last repose. And while the girl screamed in infantile fright she, too, was seized by the assailants. The blow aimed at her small, tender neck cut through, and the baby head rolled to the earth, the face still wet with tears.

Crazed by this double affliction the woman took no further heed of her surroundings, though the men quarrelled among themselves as to proprietorship. Her hands were smeared with the blood of her dear ones, and the long, light hair that hung about her was flecked with the fatal crimson. Her lips, too, were unnaturally stained and wet from kissing the lifeless faces that would never again respond to a mother's caress.

Corpses strewed the city, and though no opposition was offered the killing went on. All manners of cruelties were perpetrated. Numberless aged persons of both sexes, too feeble to even attempt an escape, had remained in their homes awaiting death with

resignation. The fortunate were those spared torture and mutilation.

The Insubres, who were particularly angered at the repulse they had sustained, surpassed all others in barbarity. In accordance with the custom among Gallic tribes they slew all women with child lest they should bring forth males. The other warriors disapproved of such wanton slaughter, and numerous quarrels ensued.

One naked Gaul, followed by a party of Africans, entered the city and began a rigorous search for valuables. Arriving at one of the larger habitations they discovered an old man crouching in the darkest corner. He was decrepit, and shook with fear at sight of the warriors.

"Where have you hidden your gold?" asked the leader. "Give it to us quickly."

But the old man denied having any, even though he was threatened with death. The Gaul laughed, and motioned to his companions to lay hold of the prisoner. This they did, and shouted with delight when they realised what was to happen. The Gaul, forcing the unfortunate creature's mouth open, seized the tongue in his fingers. All crowded about to watch

this novel piece of inhumanity. The Taurinian's bulging eyes expressed the feelings he was unable to give utterance to as the knife flashed before him.

"It will speak no more lies," exclaimed the Gaul as he raised aloft the severed member.

The mutilated man fell back unconscious. The blood flowed down his throat and made his breathing laboured. He seemed to be choking, but none remained to watch him.

It was now some hours past noon, but the sun poured warm, mellow rays upon the scene, gilding triumph and misery alike. In the increased heat the warriors from Iberia and Africa threw aside all upper clothing and bent more eagerly to the task of extermination. The battle-ground had been cleared, and the survivors were being hunted down on all sides by eager horsemen.

As the day wore on the huts were fired by the more uproarious of the soldiers, who further fed their brutal tastes by hurling the maimed and wounded into the flames. The shrieks and moans of these unfortunates mingled in awful harmony with the other sounds of lamentation that went up from the fallen city.

CHAPTER X

THE SUBSTITUTE

HANNIBAL returned to the camp during the afternoon, as the rout was then at an end. The male population of the city, with the exception of those fortunate enough to have escaped, had been completely annihilated or taken prisoners, though the latter numbered but few.

That evening a feast was to be served the leaders in the main tent, to celebrate the auspicious opening of the campaign. The soldiery were also to make merry, though naturally to a less sumptuous degree. Some had suggested the firing of the city as a significant illumination, but this the General forbade. He had placed a strong guard over the graneries, and had no mind to lose the contents.

The approach of evening threw long shadows across the fallen city, and a blood-red patch in the western sky marked where the sun had disappeared shortly before. Quiet reigned, and even Nature seemed to mourn over the surroundings.

At the breach and within the walls, bodies of brave men littered the ground. In this last great sleep soldiers of Carthage were to be found promiscuously intermingled with the flower of the Taurini. Armed and naked they lay closely locked together in antagonistic embraces that even death had not unloosed. Hands, feet, and teeth had been used when weapons had failed, and the result was ghastly in the extreme.

By this time the victors had returned to the camp. Assembling about the fires they exhibited their trophies while awaiting the preparation of the feast. It was noticed that some youths were held prisoners by languorous Iberians, who wished to luxuriate in the services of attendants. This elicited jeers.

Everything of value had been seized upon. Those who had acquired the most gold were regarded with envy, but the possessors of women attracted even greater attention. Large sums were readily offered

for the fairest, and even the least young found numerous bidders.

After considerable difficulty Anerostes had succeeded in conducting Ducaria to the camp, but it was with no little anxiety that they sat within shelter of the tent awaiting the departure of daylight.

The mountaineer was greeted with some show of pleasure by the eldest of the Gauls who occupied the same quarters with him. In return he explained how he had captured this youth. "And," he added, "he will render me service during the campaign when the others have tired of their women."

The warrior nodded approval, for he feared to do otherwise, and Anerostes proffered him some gold.

"Take this," he said, "in exchange for a service I would have you render me."

It represented a considerable sum, and the Gaul seemed surprised.

"It is necessary for me to absent myself for several hours," explained Anerostes. "The soldiers are incensed against the Taurini, and I would have you guard the youth until my return."

"It will be as you say."

"Fail me not as you value your life."

"I shall not leave the tent. Your prisoner shall be safe until your return."

With this assurance Aneroestes left Ducaria, and when darkness fell he hastened in the direction of the city. Entering by the gate from which he had escaped, he almost stumbled over the body of the dead Cincibil. He pushed it aside with his foot, for it was he who had threatened the liberty of Ducaria.

Unaffected by the awesomeness of death the more sordid among the victors still wandered, jackal-like, about the place, pouncing upon anything of value that might have been overlooked by the first comers.

Aneroestes held his sword in readiness, but no one approached him, and as he strode forward the shadowy forms seemed to fade into nothingness. Satisfied that none watched his actions he directed his attention to the fallen. Thick among them were old men and children, the end and beginning of a nation. Some women, too, had met a similar fate, though few were aught but grey haired. Nevertheless every one of these was turned over and carefully

examined by the searcher, who at times dropped on his hands and knees to procure a nearer view.

As the evening advanced the place assumed a more gruesome aspect in the white light of an incomplete moon that slowly clambered towards the centre of the heavens. This aided Aneroestes, who bent the more eagerly to his task. He kept on untiringly, but it seemed impossible for him to discover what he sought. He was no prowling robber, for he left untouched the bracelets on the stiffened arms, and any other valuables that came before his notice. In fact he scarcely did more than examine the faces of the women, though at times this necessitated the removal of other bodies.

His mission was a strange one. Once he started back in horror from a heap of dead on which was perched a vulture. He even cried out. For a moment the bird ceased its hideous meal and turned two yellow eyes upon the intruder. Sheds of flesh hung from its bloody beak. The man hurried away, but to little purpose. The presence of the dead had attracted many such loathsome creatures, who, with talons deeply imbedded in the yielding flesh, hoarsely

summoned their companions to the orgy. The heavy flap of wings foretold the arrival of newcomers. It was indeed a night of feasting for more than the Carthaginians. And as the time progressed the human jackals tried to anticipate these gluttonous carrions which, when once installed, were dangerous to disturb.

At last Aneroestes stopped before a woman who in life must have possessed much unusual beauty. Death had resulted from a severe sword cut in the neck, evidently self-inflicted, as her hand still clasped the weapon. Near by lay a Balearian, frightfully contorted in both face and body. A Numidian arrow had pierced his chest, and the sharp point protruded behind his arms. The whole betokened a tragedy—a struggle for the possession of a woman who had seized the occasion to free herself.

The mountaineer seemed but partially satisfied with his find, and gazed long at the waving hair which in death modestly shrouded the well-moulded bosom.

He muttered to himself—"The colour differs from Ducaria's. It is darker." As indeed it was by many shades.

Presently the expression of doubt vanished, and was succeeded by one of new-found hope. His eyes glistened, and his lips moved in the formation of words that were scarcely audible. Some strange idea had suddenly possessed him, and he acted under its influence.

It was full two hours since he had left the camp, and there was much to be done ere he could return to his tent where Ducaria awaited him. His fingers closed more firmly about the heavy sword he carried, and without further hesitation he knelt beside the corpse. No sign of weakness was visible on his rough face, but he shuddered slightly as he raised the shining blade and inserted the edge into the cruel wound that marred the beauty of the neck. Then he pressed strongly downward. No blood spurted as when the fresh young life was stilled. The head, thus severed, rolled forward, and the soft cheeks became wet from the dew that sparkled, tear-like, on the blades of grass.

Then Anerostes shouldered the trunk and returned in the direction of the camp.

Many furtive eyes peered after him ere he emerged

from the scene of the day's tragedy, but none made their presence known.

Shouts of intoxicated joy were borne to the mountaineer from the direction of the camp, but he varied not his course, and was soon amid the tents. The heterogeneous mass composing the army lay about the fires in easy postures, gorging themselves and indulging in all kinds of excesses. The more reckless called out jeeringly to the newcomer as he strode past with his gruesome burden, but the dangerous expression in his eyes soon checked their levity. Silence spread along the road he took, and faces heretofore ablaze with animal cravings, became bloodless and strained. It was as though a spectre had suddenly appeared at the feast.

"What manner of man is this?" was asked in hoarse whispers, but none could answer.

Others muttered—"Why visits he the field of the dead by night to carry away a headless corpse?"

Curiosity was heightened when he halted at the entrance of the main tent.

"Direct me to Himilco," he called in a loud voice, and when the guards protested he added—"I am

here at his bidding, and must enter with my burden."

.

In the great tent where the officers were assembled the sound of rejoicing, if less boisterous than that without, was none the less hearty. The pine torches threw a ruddy, cheerful glare upon the distinguished warriors as they celebrated the day's victory. The rings that adorned the fingers of the more renowned signified the number of campaigns each one had served—and they were many.

All had thrown aside mail and armour, and in semi-warlike garb seemed to feel a relaxation that was encouraged by the surroundings.

Joints of meat, with cakes of wheat and barley, constituted the chief food, and though mean in comparison with the elaborate feasts the Carthaginians were wont to indulge in when in their native city, it was none the less relished. The wine was harsh, and tasted somewhat of pitch, but after great hardships men's palates become toughened, and many goblets had been drained with evident pleasure.

Several Insubrian chiefs were present, attired in

woollen mantles of no mean texture. Gold bracelets encircled their arms, and massive chains were suspended about their necks. In some cases the pyramids of fair hair were bound with bands of the yellow metal that seemed the more dazzling in the torchlight.

Hannibal reclined on a couch at the head of the board, and his face, usually so stern, was now animated and softened with smiles. He had lost but few, and the capture of the city was sufficient to elate the spirits of the whole army. During the evening he repeatedly congratulated the Gallic chiefs on the behaviour of their men, and expressed the hope that their gallant example would be followed by their kinsmen to the south and east. "For," said he, "this would make us the better fitted to overcome Rome."

The Insubres looked pleased at the General's attentions, and assured him of their devotion to his cause.

"We can have but little trouble with the other tribes," remarked Mago enthusiastically. "Those inclined towards us will hold back no longer, and the unfriendly will be terrified at the fate of the Taurini."

But Giasco retorted, "You are yet young, and calculate not the dangers that beset our every move. The destruction of Taurasia may serve to rouse the ire of the Gauls and Ligurians."

Unrestrained laughter from all sides greeted this unfavourable prediction so characteristic of the man.

"Surely, Gisco," cried Hannibal, "your disappointment will be great if we triumph too easily over the legions of Rome?"

The burly Carthaginian joined in the merriment without any show of anger.

"At least," said he, "I am well prepared for misfortune, and disappointment caused by success is such as I can survive."

"Well spoken," replied Hannibal. "I know full well that victory too easily won is oftentimes more fatal than defeat. It gives a false confidence to the soldiers that is only overcome by calamity. But this cannot be said of to-day's conflict. At the breach the fighting was severe, and was carried on with much spirit on both sides."

Himilco smiled cynically.

"The attack," said he, "was none too mild in my

quarter. We were late in being admitted by the mountaineer, who seemed strangely excited, and numbers of the enemy were hastening to the gate in the hope of escaping. Some struggled desperately, but we left none to sorrow over defeat," and the speaker looked round to see the effect of his words.

There was a complete absence of enthusiasm, and only Carthalo spoke.

"Beware, O Himilco," said he, with mock gravity, "that thy sympathies get not the better of thee, for it is thy great weakness."

The eloquent Carthaginian feared not the anger of any man, so impregnable was his buckler of wit, though few others would have cared to so refer to the notorious cruelty of Himilco.

The latter frowned slightly and answered with some spirit—

"It is sufficient to conquer an enemy once. A second time he may be triumphant."

"That," said Hannibal, "depends upon the enemy."

"An enemy is an enemy. I make no difference between them."

"But I do," remarked the General drily. "Rome

is the natural enemy of Carthage, and my mercy will never extend to her soldiers. But the Ligurians and Gauls love her not, and if some tribes oppose us we should not always exterminate them. An ally is certainly better than a dead foe."

A buzz of approval greeted these words, though Himilco sat obstinately by, still unshaken in his opinion.

"Some allies," he muttered, "are more to be feared than open enemies."

"True," assented Hannibal, "but in keeping watch of the deceitful we must not antagonise those deserving of our confidence. The Insubres have already served us well, and they bore the brunt of to-day's battle. There is no reason to doubt but that the Boii will do as much when given the opportunity."

"And the Cenomani, what of them? And the Ligurian tribes friendly to the Taurini?"

"They have made no pretence of friendship. If they refuse to treat with my messengers a battle may be shortly expected. The fall of Taurasia may not be sufficient to impress them with our might, though my hopes are that it will have the necessary effect."

"A pleasant hope is no crime," chimed in Carthalo.

"Nor an error," added Maharbal, who during the discussion had said nothing. There was little friendship between him and Himilco, though each recognised the soldierly qualifications of the other.

"When will it be positively known if we will engage with these savage tribes?" asked Mago.

"Perhaps to-morrow," answered his brother, "though more likely we shall have to wait several days."

"And meanwhile," interposed Gisco, "the Consul Scipio is advancing."

"This time we shall not avoid him."

"The Numidians may perchance do otherwise, since their last meeting with the Romans proved so disastrous."

As Himilco uttered the words he looked jeeringly at the commander of the cavalry.

Maharbal rose to his feet in undisguised rage, but Hannibal's thundering voice checked any further move. A heated altercation was about to follow,

when a disturbance outside the tent attracted every one's attention.

Such a proceeding was most unusual. Presently one of the servants rushed in and announced that a warrior carrying a corpse insisted on seeing Himilco.

"Let him enter," shouted Hannibal, for he was still aroused by the recent proceedings.

The noise ceased, and Aneroestes appeared at the doorway bearing his burden. The unsteady light gave an additional gruesomeness to the scene, and deepened the drops of dark blood that bespattered the man's face. His long hair was disarranged to such a degree that the face was half-hidden by the matted braids, and seemed unnaturally savage. The skin of some animal was thrown across his shoulders, but it was torn and soiled as if from a hard day's struggle. An undressed wound on his left arm apparently caused him no inconvenience, though, to judge from its depth, it must have pained. He grasped a sword in his right hand, but he carried no other weapon.

"What means this intrusion?" asked Hannibal sternly.

Then his expression of anger turned to one of surprise, and he added in the Gallic tongue—

“I recognise you, Aneroestes, and have not forgotten our agreement. You performed the trust I imposed on you, and on the morrow you may free your countrymen with your own hands. But why come you here in this fashion, the bearer of a corpse?”

“I come on a strange mission,” answered the mountaineer, “and one far different from what you suppose. Your captain, Himilco, ordered me to take this woman to his tent, but I have brought her here to him. I have obeyed his orders.”

As soon as Himilco gathered the meaning of what the mountaineer had said, his face darkened in terrible anger, and, jumping to his feet, he seized a sword. Then he caught the authoritative gaze of Hannibal bent upon him, and halted.

“The man makes sport of me,” he hissed, “and defies my orders. Surely the General of the forces will not compel one of his soldiers to submit to such insult?”

“Restrain yourself,” rejoined Hannibal. “I have

yet to hear the meaning of so strange an occurrence."

"I repeat that the man makes sport of me!" exclaimed Himilco vehemently. "He, the mountaineer, so recently a slave."

"He became a slave in no dishonourable way," interposed Maharbal.

"And," added Mago, "he regained his freedom in a manner equally praiseworthy."

"A barbarian," sneered Himilco.

"A brave man," retorted Maharbal, "who opened the way for you to-day. Otherwise you might have failed."

"Silence!" commanded Hannibal. "This is neither time nor place for the airing of petty jealousies. I have yet to hear Himilco's explanation of this Gaul's strange proceedings."

"There is little of import to explain. This man was to deliver a woman at my tent, and to insult me brings a corpse."

"The cause for his behaviour can easily be ascertained," replied Hannibal, and he put the necessary questions to the mountaineer.

"I captured a maiden," explained Aneroestes, "but when bearing her away I was met by your officer, Himilco, who ordered me to take her to his tent. I said she was mine, but he threatened me with death if I refused to obey him."

At this announcement those of the officers who understood the speaker looked significantly at each other, and so enraged was Himilco that he interrupted with violent expostulations.

"The man lies!" he shouted. "I told him to take the girl to my tent and he would be rewarded handsomely."

But Aneroestes persisted in the truth of his declaration.

"It is so," he said, "that he promised me money, but not until I had been first threatened. Still, I performed my part. I was attacked by Baleares before proceeding far, and in the struggle the woman was killed."

"And Cincibil, the Insubrian, I sent with you?" asked Himilco. "Where is he to verify your story?"

Aneroestes grinned at the question.

"Cincibil is dead," he said. "His body lies in the

place where it fell. He made a good fight, but they were too many for us. Even I am wounded," and he exhibited his lacerated arm.

"It seems strange that you alone should have escaped," remarked Himilco meaningly, "and with but a cut in the arm. How is it, too, that you report the occurrence to me only now—five hours after it happened?"

"It was none of my doing," retorted Anerostes stubbornly; "and, when the fight became too fierce, I fled. Of what use was there to stay when the woman was killed?"

"None," replied Hannibal, "and your life, Anerostes, is too valuable to be sacrificed in such a cause. I have need of your services in the future, and I will be mindful to reward you for what is past. And thus I publicly thank you. This man," continued the General, addressing his brother-officers, "is entitled to our highest regard, for it was through him that the city fell so easily."

"He was slow enough in opening the gate," interposed Himilco savagely. "I waited long for the signal, and when we arrived we were not admitted

with the promptitude we had a right to expect. What cause was there for delay save that this fellow was securing a captive woman for his pleasure?"

Himilco spoke in his own language, but when Hannibal translated the words to Aneroestes, a blaze of wrath contorted the mountaineer's face, and he answered—

"There was a cause sufficient to detain me, for after I waved the signal I was attacked. The captain might have seen the body of my opponent, for I directed his attention to it. In no other way did I fail to do the things I was commanded."

Hannibal checked the angry reply that rose to Himilco's lips, and once more addressed himself to the mountaineer.

"You will be richly rewarded, though you asked only for the freedom of your countrymen. Another time—to-morrow—you shall tell me how you fared when in the city. You must have encountered many dangers, and I rejoice in your safety. And now you may retire. What, would you ask me something further?" as the mountaineer lingered.

"If at another time I take a prisoner—a woman—have I your permission to keep her as my own?"

"You have indeed; and now remove the corpse."

Aneroestes shouldered his burden and left the tent amid silence.

"Himilco," said the General, "that man asked if his rightful plunder would in future be his own, and I assured him that he need have no fear. Do you understand?" and the speaker fixed his piercing black eyes upon his subordinate.

A sneer still lingered about Himilco's thin lips. He simply bowed, and answered—

"I understand the reprimand that is perhaps not altogether deserved. The word of a barbarian should not carry too much weight as evidence against an officer of Carthage."

"Your anger prompts you to say unreasonable things. In the presence of us all you admitted the truth of the man's story."

"You misunderstand me. What the mountaineer said about the woman was true, but I would have paid him well for her. Furthermore, it has not been

the custom of men of our rank to ask permission of an inferior to gratify our tastes."

Himilco looked about him as though expecting the others present to support this opinion. But sympathy was nowhere visible, and Hannibal sternly answered—

"It has not been customary, as you say, to do this in Carthage, but I hold differently. The rights of my soldiers shall be respected. Any promises I make them must be fulfilled. There can be no exceptions."

Himilco bit his lip, while the others murmured approval.

CHAPTER XI

DISCOVERED

THE second day after his victory over the Taurini, Hannibal moved eastward with half his army, and left the remainder to follow later under the command of Himilco.

The Consul Scipio was pushing forward in all haste, and a complete subjugation of the unfriendly tribes north of the Padus was deemed necessary by the Carthaginians before crossing arms with the Romans. Hannibal wished to superintend this work in person, with the aid of Maharbal, and he expected that the continued presence of Himilco at Taurasia would be sufficient to keep in check the inhabitants of the traversed country.

Aneroestes had hoped that he would be among those to accompany the General, but Maharbal pre-

ferred that the Numidians and cavalry from Lusitania should do the work of ravaging the country. The Gallic troops were therefore left behind.

True to his promise, Hannibal personally released all the captive Centrones, and, while Aneroestes stood by, he eloquently explained to them the reason for his clemency.

"This man of your own tribe," he said, "has served me truly and well. But for him we would have lost many more soldiers in yesterday's battle. He entered yonder city at the risk of his life, and remained there two days. In the midst of the storming, when the breach was made, he opened the rear gate and admitted some of my soldiers who were lying in wait without. As a reward for this brave act he asked not for riches or personal gain, but only for the liberty of his kinsmen. Therefore, thank him and not me for the breaking of the slave-chains that bind you."

At this announcement the emaciated captives raised a shout of joy. When their limbs were freed they clustered about their deliverer and endeavoured to express the gratitude with which they were filled. Some sank to the ground before him and wept ; while

others laughed and became wildly hysterical. But Anerostes said little, and appeared indifferent to the homage offered him. He had sacrificed much to obtain the freedom of his captive brethren, and though at the last he had drawn back, it was only for love of Ducaria. His thoughts were ever with her. He cursed his stupidity for not having appealed to Hannibal instead of practising deception. But it was now too late.

Ducaria trusted her protector implicitly. His extraordinary devotion overcame every doubt that arose in her mind. He had saved her from Himilco, and for no selfish purpose. On all sides she saw her unfortunate sisters dishonoured, and she shuddered at her own escape. But even yet her position was uncertain, as an unwise step would sweep away the protection she now enjoyed. Thinking thus, she crouched in a corner of the tent during the absence of Anerostes. The warmth of her welcome always moved him deeply, and he would whisper encouragement to her, so that for the time she would forget her surroundings.

The danger was nevertheless great. Many Taurinian women and a few youths were prisoners in the camp, and being allowed considerable liberty, Anerostes

feared that some might come face to face with Ducaria. The result of such a meeting would, perhaps, prove disastrous. And yet she could not avoid publicity, for in order to have it appear that she was his male servant, Aneroestes was obliged to impose duties on her. This necessitated a certain mingling with the soldiers.

There had been some comment over the strange behaviour of the mountaineer, and curious eyes often followed Ducaria as she led the horses to the stream. When in the camp he always accompanied his captive under the pretext of seeing that she did her work to his satisfaction. But in the early part of the second day, after Hannibal's departure, he was called away with several hundred others to accompany Mago on an expedition. He knew he would be absent until evening, and cautioned Ducaria to exercise the greatest prudence.

"For," said he, "remember that Himilco is in camp, and his eyes are sharp."

"I shall but water the horse," she answered, "and the remainder of the day I shall abide in the shelter of the tent."

Disguised though she was in the costume of one of the opposite sex, Ducaria constantly feared discovery, and it was with unusual anxiety that she awaited the time when Aneroestes should return. Never had it been necessary for him to absent himself for so long before. During the morning she remained within the tent and polished the mountaineer's arms and the trappings of his horse. The day seemed unending. She wondered when escape from the vigilance of the guards would be possible, for Aneroestes had promised to fly with her at the first safe opportunity. It would not now have satisfied her to depart alone. She felt the need of this strong man, and his devotion had awakened responsive feelings within her.

Early in the afternoon a fine rain began to fall, and the two occupants of the tent, who had not accompanied Mago, quickly sought shelter within. Both were Gauls. After watching Ducaria for awhile, they entered into conversation with her. Their questions became awkward.

"Why," asked one, "did your master seize you when beautiful women were plentiful?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Surely he had opportunities?" continued the speaker.

"Ask him. He may tell you."

She noted with pleasure that her remark disconcerted the man, who would have feared to anger the mountaineer. To avoid further trouble she explained that the time was at hand for her to attend to the horse.

Though the weather was unpleasant, she led the animal to the river, and sat on the bank while he drank.

A cutting wind blew raindrops into her face. It was very cold, but she felt more at ease than in the tent, where her every movement was watched. Her eager eyes sought the opposite bank of the Padus, gray and forbidding in the semi-mist, but representative of safety. Some day, soon, she and Aneroestes would escape hither.

Suddenly her musings were interrupted by the arrival of a score or more of soldiers with their horses. Ducaria noticed with some alarm that nearly the whole number were Gauls. She arose and seized

her steed. The newcomers gazed at her angrily and muttered threats, for they wished no male enemy to live.

"It is the youth taken by Aneroestes," said one.

"A strange choice."

"He first had the corpse of a woman, but that would hardly satisfy him."

This elicited a laugh, and the speaker added: "So he took a youth unto himself."

"He would ape the Iberians," sneered another.

"The Iberians have no such youth as that; none so gentle appearing or finely modelled."

The man was examining her closely, and Ducaria saw with alarm that he was one of those who had accompanied Himilco when he entered the city. He was called Magilus.

She hastily prepared to depart from such dangerous company.

"He does seem fragile," exclaimed a swarthy warrior who stood close at hand.

"I care not for your criticisms," she retorted. "My master is powerful enough to protect me."

"But he is not here."

"He will return soon, and if aught has harmed me his vengeance will be terrible."

Jeers answered the threat.

"His voice is as delicate as his form," cried Magilus. "And see how he colours, as though he were a maiden."

Ducaria blushed the more. She had, however, succeeded in mounting the horse, and with a quick movement attempted to force a way through the circle that had been formed about her. But Magilus seized the bridle, and the others laughed. By this time, too, other soldiers had been attracted by the commotion, and the unfortunate girl recognised that escape was hardly possible. Still she did not despair. Leaning forward, she smote the man before her. He staggered, and the horse dashed forward, but only a few feet. Angry hands again laid hold of her, and she found herself a prisoner, hemmed in on all sides.

It was useless to struggle, but she ceased not to do so while her strength lasted.

"Give me justice," she cried. "I am no coward, and will gladly fight any man singly."

"And gladly would I see thee fight," hissed Magilus,

who advanced near to where she stood, and gazed searchingly into her face.

"Then have me released."

"I would have you fight as do the warriors of your tribe," and his gaze seemed to pierce her disguise.

"How mean you?"

"Naked to the waist."

"Think you he has no muscle?" asked one near by.

"Surely the blow you received should be sufficient to prove otherwise."

The crowd laughed, but Magilus was determined.

"I care not for the muscles," he replied, "but I will wager my horse that his breasts are larger than a man's should be."

"It is false," shouted Ducaria, and she attempted to reach her tormentor. But she was held back, and her increasing confusion seemed to bear out the truth of Magilus's words.

"Will you bare yourself?" he asked mockingly. "Tis but a little thing for a man to do."

"Why should I?" retorted the girl. "I can fight as I am and overcome you."

"It would be a pity to scratch that delicate skin.

Your master would spurn you, and your occupation would be gone."

All this vastly amused the audience, and some one called out, "In truth his breasts heave like a woman's."

Another added: "I wonder what the mountaineer wanted with a youth when the opportunity was his to pick the finest woman in the city."

"His taste is good," remarked several.

"The face seems familiar to me," said Magilus. "I cannot be mistaken."

"You are all liars," cried Ducaria, though her whole bearing belied the strong words. "And you are cowards," she added, as the crowd jeered loudly.

The noise attracted the attention of soldiers of various races, who came hurrying forward to learn the cause of the excitement. These did not understand what was being said, and concluded that a Taurinian youth was to be put to death. Their faces betokened no intelligence as the indignant speaker addressed her persecutors, but they patiently awaited developments.

"I offer to fight any one of you," persisted the girl, "but you all fear a single combat."

"I will willingly fight if you strip to the waist," retorted Magilus, who still bore the mark of her hand.

"I shall fight only as I am."

"Then others can rid you of your upper garments, and the multitude assembled here will judge of your sex."

"Yes, yes; disrobe him," shouted the Gauls in the rear, for the girl's strong opposition to so simple an act convinced those heretofore in doubt.

Eager hands instantly started the work, and though she resisted with unlooked-for strength, it was in vain. She was pinioned and rendered helpless. Her jacket was quickly ripped off, then the tunic beneath. That was all. A shout arose as her magnificent breasts were revealed to view. She attempted to sink to the ground, but she was held up, so that all might see.

Surprise was mingled with the admiration of those who were awaiting a bloody *dénouement*. Some advanced nearer with blazing eyes and breath steaming

with passion. One called out that he was willing to purchase the prize, but in the excitement and commotion none heeded him.

"She is the same whom Aneroestes declared killed," shouted Magilus in exultation, "but she will not escape now."

Ducaria longed for death, and the eyes that a short time before had been brave in anger, now dropped tears. She saw in her discovery nothing but shame and degradation. Without raising her head she was conscious of the hundreds of eyes greedily fastened upon her. As in a dream she heard the quarrelling between the men who had been instrumental in disclosing her true sex. Some wanted to draw lots for her, others were in favour of a joint ownership, while a few of the more wealthy suggested disposing of her to the highest purchaser.

But as they argued a commotion on the border of the crowd disturbed the proceedings. Horsemen were advancing at a smart pace. Even the most absorbed among the spectators gave way before the plunging animals and the shouts of their riders.

Ducaria looked up, then started in horror. Imme-

diately in front of her, surrounded by his horsemen, was Himilco.

"What means this disturbance?" he asked, and his voice was as harsh as the expression on his white face.

"We have found a woman in man's attire," replied one of the principals. "She denied her sex, and we proved it in the manner you see."

The Carthaginian drew nearer and gazed admiringly upon the semi-nude form that quivered under his inspection.

"It is a pity she should conceal such charms," he said, "for she is certainly most favoured by the gods. How comes it she escaped detection before?"

"She is the same," explained Magilus, "whom you ordered Anerostes, the mountaineer to convey to your tent. But he lied to you and said she was dead. He robed her as a youth and she passed as his servant. I suspected her, and soon discovered the trick."

Himilco's face brightened, and he commended the Gaul for his discernment. Then, bending towards Ducaria, he said—

"I recognise you now. You still live, and your lover deceived me. It was craftily done, but you are at last delivered into my hands, and I will keep you."

"Praise be to the noble Himilco!" cried Magilus.

"I shall take the girl for myself," said Himilco, "and you shall all be amply rewarded."

At this announcement all faces brightened, for it had been at first feared that the officer would possess himself of the prize without considering the claims of his inferiors.

Instigated by Magilus the crowd shouted: "Praise be to the noble Himilco!"

The Carthaginian acknowledged the demonstration with a smile. Then turning to his guards he said—

"Keep a look out for this Aneroestes, and see that he is restored to the slave chains that formerly bound him. As for the girl, take her to my tent. Bind her, though not too tightly, and watch her closely. I have yet much to inspect about the camp before my return.

Those within hearing grinned, and the shout again arose: "Praise be to the noble Himilco!"

CHAPTER XII

THE ESCAPE

LATE in the afternoon Mago and his troop returned. The rain had ceased, but thick clouds still hung low in the sky and a further fall was probable.

Though chilled and tired, Aneroestes pressed forward none the less quickly. He longed for Ducaria. When the camp was reached he surprised his companions by galloping ahead between the irregular rows of tents. Some expected to see the horse stumble, but the rider guided it with safety.

Two of the Gauls who shared his tent were within when the mountaineer appeared at the entrance.

"Where is my youth?" he asked.

The warriors were those who by their questionings had driven Ducaria to seek solitude elsewhere.

Neither, however, had suspected her of being a woman, and her presence impressed them but little.

"He has not been here for some time," answered one.

The other added: "He went to water the horse."

"And has not yet returned?"

"We have not seen him."

Aneroestes hurried away without questioning further.

"Surely," he muttered to himself, "none could have discovered her sex."

But he feared otherwise. Arriving at the bank of the river he saw his horse in the possession of an Insubrian. Though many others stood by he could not discern Ducaria. For a moment he thought she had suffered death at the hands of these violent men who hungered after the blood of every male enemy, but as he approached one raised a shout of laughter in which the others readily joined. While they individually feared the mountaineer, their numbers gave them confidence.

Aneroestes dreaded the significance of this mockery,

but asked with feigned curiosity: "Why do you laugh?"

They became more uproarious, and slapped each other on the back to emphasise their mirth.

"Surely you must all be fools," he continued, and at this show of anger the laughter became more violent.

"Have you seen Himilco?" asked one.

"Where is your captive maiden?" queried Magilus. It was he who held the horse.

The mountaineer came nearer and snatched the bridle out of the other's hand.

"My horse," he growled.

"Even so it will be of little use when Himilco encounters you."

"Himilco is naught to me, and I understand not your remarks, for I have no captive maiden."

"Himilco is naught to him. He has no captive maiden," mocked Magilus. "In truth, he has no maiden now."

This last remark caused a fresh outburst of merriment, and Aneroestes glared at the crowd.

"Where is my youth?" he shouted. "I find the horse here in your hands without him."

"Your youth has become a maiden," explained one, "and has been honoured by Himilco. While he inspects the camp she awaits him in his tent."

"And that is why you shout and laugh like fools?" cried the mountaineer.

Magilus smiled.

"We must laugh," he said. "It is so strange. We discovered the youth's sex. The face was familiar, for I was with Himilco when he entered the city. I there saw the maiden you held captive, and she was beautiful. I suspected your choice. The heaving bosom could not be hidden beneath the man's raiment. Though she protested—yes, and smote me in the face—it was useless. We tore away the lying dress. And then Himilco came up and ordered her to be taken to his tent."

While the man disclosed the fate of Ducaria the eyes of the mountaineer had become ablaze with an awful fury. He took a step forward, but said nothing. Magilus felt for his knife, though he relied on his companions to guard him from attack. But Aneroestes sprang at him with the rapidity of a wild animal and buried his fingers in the other's throat. There

was a short struggle, then the man fell to the ground with face discoloured and a bloody froth on his lips.

At this the rest became silent, and none interfered with the avenger as he led his horse away. Some would have liked to follow him, but the foreboding look on his face intimidated them, and the sight of the throttled warrior at their feet restrained their impulsiveness.

"Himilco will see to the fellow's punishment," muttered one, and with this assurance all were forced to be content.

Aneroestes did not return to his tent, for he felt that Himilco might already have stationed some one there to await his coming. He followed the bank of the river a considerable distance till a bend in its course hid him from the view of the curious. Evening was drawing in, and the trees that fringed the water's edge afforded him a temporary hiding-place.

He had gathered from the jibing remarks hurled at him that Himilco had sent Ducaria to his tent under the guidance of soldiers, and that it would be after nightfall before he would return from his duties.

Twilight was short-lived, and soon the camp-fires

shone out brilliantly clear against a background of growing darkness. Occasional stars peeped through rents in ragged clouds, and the shrill cries of the east wind rose and fell mournfully. The moon was due to rise some hours later, and Aneroestes wished to save Ducaria before its white light illumined the surroundings. He had halted about four stades beyond the extreme line of tents at a small grove of trees that suggested a suitable hiding-place. Here he tethered his horse. Then throwing himself on the wet ground he watched the restless Padus.

He had decided on a most venturesome move, but it was necessary to wait a little for the black reign of night. When the time arrived he rose to his feet, and hastened quietly back to the camp. No sentry noticed him.

Himilco's tent was in the midst of the African infantry, who had been assigned a choice plot near the river and farthest removed from the city. Consequently Aneroestes was not obliged to penetrate far into the interior. But great caution was nevertheless necessary in order to avoid awkward questioning, for he spoke not the language of the soldiers thereabouts.

The darkness enabled him to reach the rear of the tent without arousing the attention of the guard on the opposite side. An intense joy possessed him at the thought of again rescuing the woman he loved from the embrace of the Carthaginian.

No movement came from within, though he listened patiently. He attempted to creep under, but there was insufficient room, and he feared to pull at the base too violently. He inserted the point of his dagger in the canvas covering and made a slit. It tore with a rasping sound and he expected that an alarm would be raised. But the silence remained undisturbed, and he regained confidence. Cautiously he pushed his head through the opening, but he could discern nothing. Ducaria might not be there. Himilco might have had her conveyed elsewhere. The possibility of such a thing caused him to tremble violently, and without further hesitation he crept through the aperture. His every movement was silent, but this he did not realise. The darkness of the place was impenetrable. He paused motionless for several moments, but his alert hearing was conscious of no breathing save his own.

Outside the wind moaned fretfully.

Stealthily he crawled on hands and knees, first in one direction, then in another, feeling his way as he advanced. At last his hand came in contact with the skin of some animal. His nervous fingers groped about the covering and touched a form. Instantly a startled cry almost paralysed him with surprise.

"It is I—Aneroestes," he whispered, for he recognised Ducaria's voice, and secreted himself beside the couch.

He was none too soon, for the guard hearing the noise entered the tent. He held the flap open to admit some light from the fire without. Had he brought a torch the rent would have surely been discovered.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

But he was a Libyan, and Ducaria could not understand him. She attempted to explain by signs that the cords were paining her wrist, but the man only shrugged his shoulders and retired.

Aneroestes made no movement for some little time, and when he ventured out Ducaria murmured his name. He seized her in his arms and rapturously

kissed her. It was the first time, but she made no resistance, for she loved him.

"I thought you were gone from me for ever," he said; "but I have found you. I am not too late."

"Free my hands and feet," she commanded in a soft voice.

"No, no; it would be unwise. We must wait."

"But you will save me, good Aneroestes?"

"Yes, when the camp sleeps. We will seek your kinsmen beyond the Padus, and you shall be my wife."

"But Himilco," she exclaimed. "Do you forget that he will soon be here?"

"He may be late."

"I fear he will be here soon."

"Even so we must wait," said Aneroestes with determination.

"And you do not fear Himilco?"

"No; I shall kill him."

"But he will call the guard."

"He will not have time. When he comes I shall kill him. Our escape will not then be known before morning."

There was confidence in the tone, but Ducaria feared, and she whispered—

“There is much danger in the plan. Let us not wait. Free my limbs and we can escape at once.”

But the mountaineer was obdurate.

“Himilco may soon return,” he explained, “and if he finds you gone the camp would be at once roused to pursue us. We would surely be captured. So be patient and all will be well.”

“Where will you conceal yourself?”

“I shall have to stay without.”

Ducaria tightened her hold on him, and he continued—

“It is necessary. If I remain I may be discovered. The hole in the tent would be seen in the light of the torch. I must be outside to hold the pieces together. When Himilco approaches the couch his back will be turned to me and I shall creep in. While he talks to you I shall stab him with my knife.”

“And if you should fail? If you are seen and prevented from coming to my assistance? Must I submit without a struggle?”

“No, no; I would not have it so. I place this

knife in your bosom. He will surely unbind you, and if my stroke should fail, there is still one way for you to escape him."

"Now I shall be more content; but what weapon have you?"

"I have a larger knife, but I may not need it. I can strangle him as I did the Gaul to-day—the foul Magilus who disrobed you."

"You killed him!" ejaculated Ducaria. "It is well. He deserved to die, and I rejoice that you did the deed. But what noise is that?"

"It is time for me to retire. Fear nothing." And before she realised it he was gone.

The camp had gradually relapsed into quietude. All save the sentries seemed to sleep. The watchers had not long to wait, for shortly after Anerostes had secreted himself footsteps were heard.

Himilco had returned. He entered the tent preceded by a man who carried a pine-torch.

"Has she been quiet?" asked the Carthaginian.

"Once she cried out. I hastened to learn the cause. She held up her hands as if the cords were hurting her."

"Did you loosen them?"

"No. They seemed not over tight."

"Was she searched to see if any weapon was concealed about her person?"

"Yes. Two Insubrian women searched her."

"It is well. You may go; and see that I am not disturbed."

The guard retired.

After relieving himself of his coat of mail, Himilco approached the couch. His face was flushed, and his eyes shone.

"So the thongs hurt you," he said, seating himself beside Ducaria.

"Yes."

"And will you love me if I free you?"

"No, for I hate you."

She almost hissed the words, but Himilco laughed.

"I shall unbind you notwithstanding," he said, "and afterwards you will learn to love me."

His sword was near at hand, and seizing it, he severed the cords that bound her feet.

"You are still a youth," he remarked, "but the costume is less becoming than the one I will give you."

"You have not freed my hands."

"A kiss first," he murmured.

"No, no," she answered. "I am in your power, but at least allow me what little strength I have."

Himilco was amused at the girl's spirit.

"You are not over tamed," he said, "but I can quickly conquer you."

While speaking he freed her hands.

She attempted to rise, but he held her down.

"Am I not a more pleasing master than your mountaineer?" he asked, and in his passion he pressed her hands until she cried out.

She hoped this would bring Aneroestes.

"He is coarse and uncouth," continued the Carthaginian, "and unfit to mate with one of your beauty. He will be restored to slavery for having kept you from me, but I shall honour you. The women of my country live in ease and luxury, and I shall give you all that they enjoy. Your beauty attracts me, and I shall not tire of you soon. Will you, then, yield willingly to me, or must I possess you by force?"

Ducaria shook with excitement. Why did not Aneroestes strike? She did not know he had

encountered great difficulty in entering the tent without attracting attention. Neither could she see that he had at last succeeded, and with slow, stealthy steps, was advancing towards his prey.

While the passionate words were being poured into her ear she nervously fingered the knife secreted in her bosom. Suddenly Himilco bent down and kissed her. The contact with his lips roused a maniacal rage within her. With a quick movement she drew the weapon. He took no heed of the action for his burning lips still sought hers, and in an instant the blade had pierced his throat. He started back gasping, and Aneroeses, not realising what had happened, seized him from behind with iron fingers that soon completed the work. No sound was made, and when satisfied that life was extinct the mountaineer lowered the body to the ground.

"I did not mean that you should strike the blow!" he said, "though it was well aimed."

He stepped over the corpse and took Ducaria in his arms.

"And I had not thought to do so until he kissed me. That maddened me, and I was not afraid."

"I was near at hand."

"Yes, but I could not see you, and you were long in coming. See," she added, "my face is covered with his blood."

"It matters not, for the night is dark. But we must not wait longer. Put this cloak about you and keep the knife."

"Is he not dead?" asked Ducaria, as Anerostes suddenly knelt beside the body.

"He is quite dead. I am but taking his ring. If we are stopped it may be of service. I am ready now. Come."

But Ducaria threw herself into his arms.

"If," she whispered, "aught happens I would have you know that I love you."

The mountaineer's face glowed with happiness, and he crushed the clinging form to him.

For a while there was silence, then he bade her follow him through the slit in the tent. The night was dark, and the fires had burned low, but vigilant sentries paced to and fro within easy distance of each other.

After creeping from the vicinity of Himilco's tent,

Aneroestes found it would be impossible to get away unobserved, so he whispered to Ducaria, and both rose to their feet. They passed the first guard with a nod, but when they reached the outskirts and thought the worst danger over, the man there posted accosted them. He was a Celtiberian and managed to understand Aneroestes, who professed to be a bearer of news from Himilco. For evidence he produced the ring.

But even then the sentry blocked the way.

"You are Aneroestes, the mountaineer," he said; "but who is your companion?"

"My servant—a Taurinian youth."

"The same you have had with you since the city fell?"

"Yes, the same."

The man rested on his spear and roared with laughter.

"It is said that your youth did to-day become a woman, and was taken by Himilco. So I will not let you pass, for——"

Ere he could finish, Aneroestes was upon him, and both went to the ground. But the Celtiberian being

of powerful build was not easily overcome. He clasped his assailant and shouted the alarm in a strong voice that re-echoed on all sides. Anerostes attempted to wrench himself free, but it was no easy matter, and he could make little use of his arms. Plunging about as they were, it was some little time before Ducaria could render any adequate assistance. But presently the Celtiberian rolled on top, and she plunged her dagger into his back. It was sufficient, and her companion, thus relieved, sprang to his feet.

"To the river," he said, and seizing her hand he hastened forward into the darkness.

Cries now arose on all sides. Not only had the warning of the sentry been heard, but Himilco's guards had discovered the fate of their master. The camp was in an uproar, but much time had been lost before an organised search was begun.

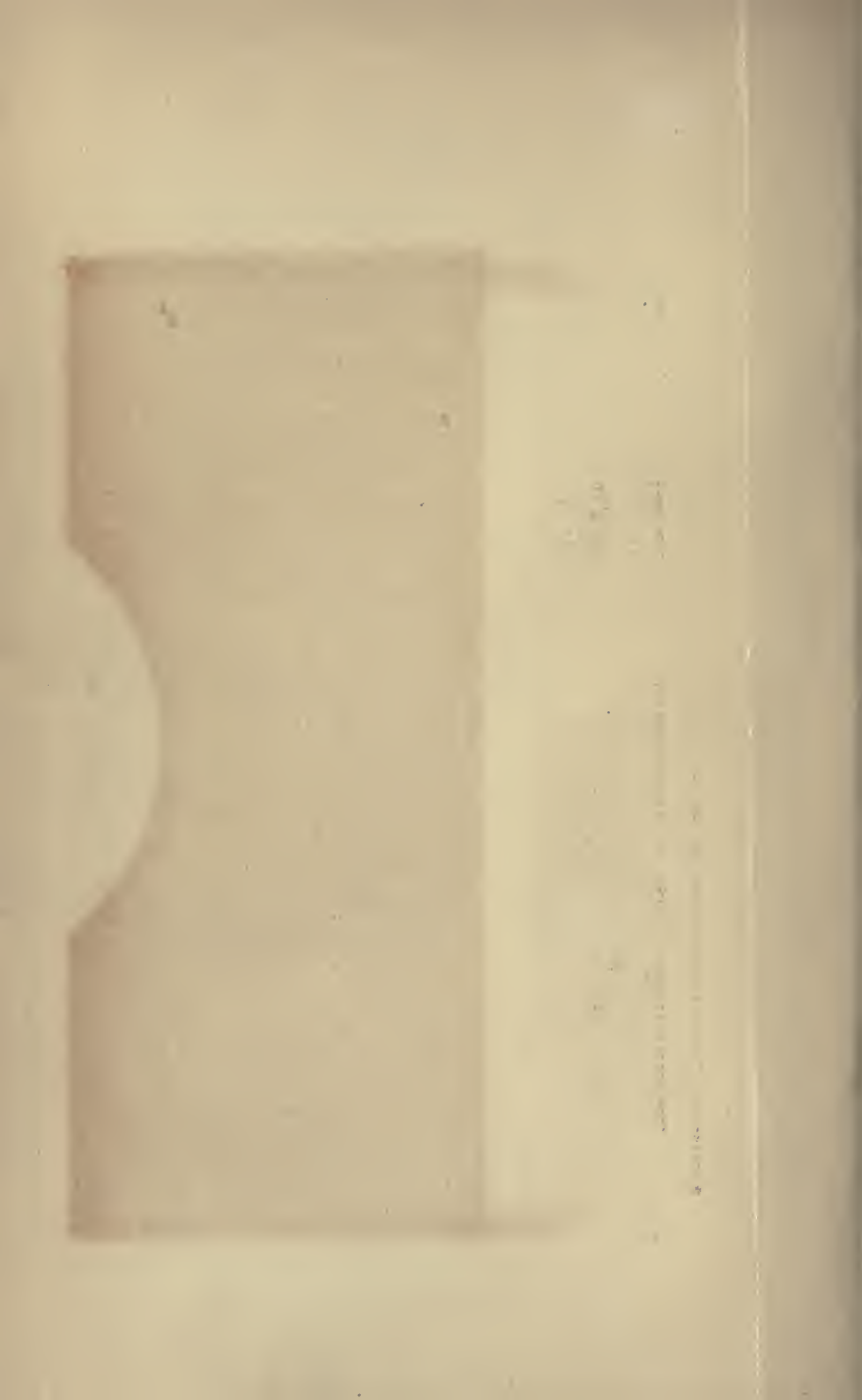
The moon had just risen, and emerging from behind some clouds, was proceeding with rapidity across a narrow patch of clear sky. The whole country became bathed in the powerful light, and the pursuers raised a loud shout at this unex-

pected assistance, for it revealed the fugitives to them.

Aneroestes and Ducaria knew they were discovered, but they quickened their steps and soon reached the river. It was broad at this point, but both were strong swimmers, and their sole hope lay in gaining the opposite bank. They struck out boldly and made rapid progress, but a shower of stones and arrows warned them that the danger was great.

None swam after them, as it was felt that one of the many missiles would do the work. Presently the mountaineer was seen to toss up his arms and sink slowly. A savage shout went up from those on shore, and as they yelled the moon burrowed its way into a cloud bank and shut out the scene.

And in the darkness of the night Ducaria struggled against the waters with her burden. For life remained with him, and that life was dear to her.



305088 LE

S6458a

Author Smith, Edgar Maurice

Title Anercestes the Gaul.

NAME OF BORROWER.

University of Toronto Library

DO NOT
REMOVE
THE
CARD
FROM
THIS
POCKET

Acme Library Card Pocket
LOWE-MARTIN CO. LIMITED

